

Black Summoner: Volume 3

Doufu Mayoi

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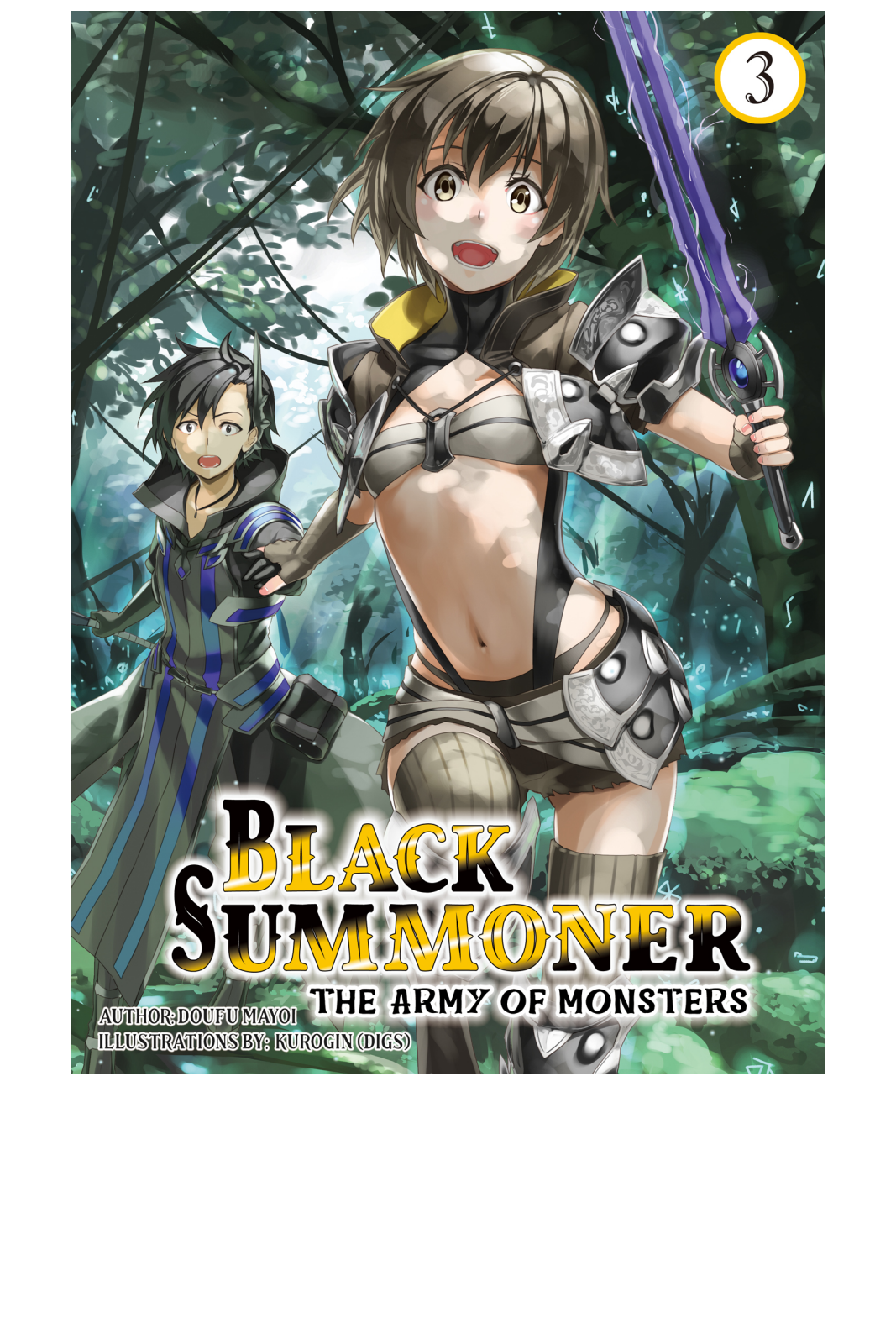


BLACK SUMMONER

THE ARMY OF MONSTERS

AUTHOR: DOUFU MAYOI

ILLUSTRATIONS BY: KUROGIN (DIGS)



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"SO...
WHAT
DO YOU
THINK?"

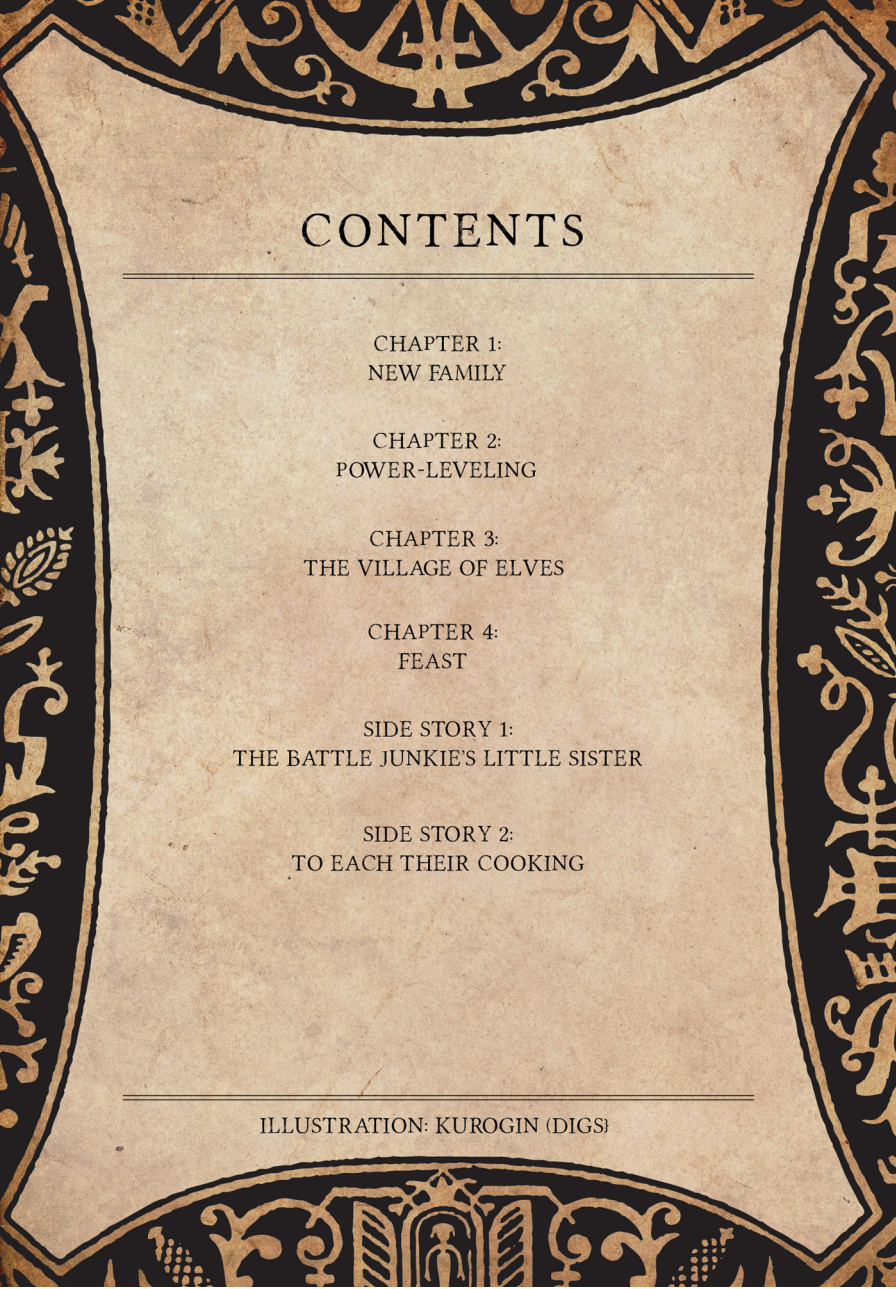
"P-PASSABLY
TO MY LIKING,
I SUPPOSE."

THE GODDESS
GIGGLED AND
REPLIED, "IS
THAT SO?"

I REALIZED
ONCE AGAIN
JUST HOW MUCH
I SUCKED AT
LYING.

MELFINA





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ILLUSTRATION: KUROGIN (DIGS)

Chapter 1: New Family

The morning after our safe — if it could be called “safe” — return to Parth, my companions and I were enjoying a hearty breakfast together at our inn of choice, the Fairy’s Song.

It had been quite a while since we had last enjoyed Clare’s homemade cooking. The nostalgia helped to make the well-balanced spread of freshly baked bread, corn soup, salad, bacon, and eggs taste that much more delicious. Of course, the Japanese cuisine in Toraj had been a great delight, but Western-style cuisine was good too. It was nice that living in modern Japan had taught me to appreciate both in equal measure.

“Kel-chan, I heard that the Queen of Toraj took a liking to you,” said Clare with a warm smile as she brought over seconds of the corn soup for Sera. “Look at you, barreling right down the highway to success!”

“News sure spreads fast. Who’d you hear it from?” *We just came back yesterday and she already knows?*

“Ange-chan is going around telling everyone she meets. Every adventurer in Parth must know by now! I guess she was just that happy about it!”

Ange again, huh. She did the same thing back when I was promoted to Rank A. I mean, I’d honestly prefer not to draw so much attention to myself, but having a friend who’s so happy for me does warm my heart.

“Just to set the record straight, I don’t have any intention of serving Toraj. Being an adventurer and doing whatever I want suits me much more.”

“Is that so? Then again, it’s *you* we’re talking about. I’m sure whatever you decide to do will go well.”

“Now you’re just making too much of me,” I laughed.

In fact, I had indeed been solicited by the Queen of Toraj, Tsubaki-sama, but I wasn’t remotely interested in taking her up on the offer.

“By the way, what will we be doing today, Master?” asked Efil.

Sera lifted her head from her food. “Right, we haven’t talked about what we’ll be doing now that we’re back. So, what’re we thinking? How about hitting a dungeon?”

I smiled wryly. “We did just get home, so today will be a day off. I myself am going off to buy something after this.”

“Oh my,” exclaimed Clare. “What’s a Rank A adventurer like Kel-chan going to buy? Could it be another cute slave like our Efil-chan?”

Another s— what are you saying, Clare? And “our Efil-chan”? Efil’s mine!

“Is that true, Master?”

“A man’s got to do what a man’s got to do,” Gerard chortled. “I understand, my king.”

“What?! No!” Don’t be carried along by the flow of this conversation, Efil! And Gerard, I’m thankful for your endless support, but please shut up for now. “I’m not going to buy a slave. I already have Efil, so why would I?”

Clare laughed. “You two youngsters sure make me jealous.”

Efil stayed silent and her expression remained unchanged, but her ears were slightly red and twitching about. Apparently, what I had said made her very happy.

“So then, what *will* you be buying, Kel-chan?”

“Nothing much. Just a house.”

“I see, just a h— A HOUSE?!”

“Mhm, a house.” *My very own dream house!*

“There you go with your shocking announcements again. Do you have enough money?”

“I *am* a Rank A adventurer, after all. I have more than enough.”

Lately, pretty much all the quests that we’d been accepting were Rank A and Rank S subjugations. And the rewards for quests of those levels had one or two extra digits, thanks to which I’d actually met my desired budget.

The reason rewards rose sharply for quests that were ranked A or higher was the difficulty of those tasks rose just as sharply. Rank B monsters could be handled by most knight orders, although the fight would be far from easy. To defeat monsters stronger than that, however, the country in peril would have no choice but to activate its greatest fighting strength, which would normally be tucked away as a secret ace. From the point of view of a government, adding a few extra digits to their expenses to have a mere adventurer take on that burden instead was a bargain.

The point was, after Viktor, the Black Wind incident, and the defeat of the evil dragon in Toraj, I was practically swimming in cash. Almost all of it was currently residing within Clotho’s Storage, as it was far too much to lug around myself.

“You were thinking of buying a house?” Sera asked in surprise. “It’s my first time hearing that!”

“Oh, right, you hadn’t joined us yet when we talked about it last. Efil, Gerard, do you two remember?”

Gerard scratched his head. “Uh...when was this again?”

“It was back when we had just reached Rank B. At the time, we were far short of how much we needed, so it was basically just a pie in the sky. Efil, we went around Parth picking out properties we liked, didn’t we? Though the idea sort of fizzled out after that.”

“I’m afraid I don’t remember it at all, my king.”

Well, I can’t say I’m surprised. Gerard hadn’t seemed all that interested back then. He’s pretty much the type who’s satisfied as long as he has somewhere to sleep.

“In any case, we’re back in Parth now, and we have more than enough money for a home this time, so I’m thinking of looking through those properties again.”

Sera’s eyes lit up. “I’m coming too! I want to see houses!”

“Please allow me to come along as well. As I remember, we had narrowed it down to three places last time.”

“Great. We’ll go to the realtor to see if those properties are still up for sale. What about you, Gerard?”

“Since everyone is going, I shall follow suit.”

“Okay, then. Let’s meet out front thirty minutes after breakfast.”

“It seems like it was only yesterday that you came to my inn as a newcomer, but here you are, about to buy a house and strike off on your own! Time really does fly. Tell me when you’ve decided on a place, Kel-chan. This time, we have to properly celebrate the start of a new stage of your life!”

“Thank you, Clare. I promise you’ll be the first to know when we’ve decided.”

After finishing the remainder of our food, we split up to make our respective preparations before heading out.



When we arrived at the realtor’s office, the staff member on duty stared at me. After a few seconds of silence, he promptly rushed into the back of the store, shouting, “Boooosssss!” at the top of his lungs.

A middle-aged man — the store owner, presumably — came out a moment later and informed us that he would be handling our case himself. Every aspect of his service was performed with the utmost courtesy and care. Clearly, being a Rank A adventurer was a rather big deal.

Unfortunately, two of the three properties that Efil and I previously had our eyes on had already been purchased by others in the meantime, so the realtor took us to check out the remaining property in person.

“Ahh, this one...”

“Indeed! You have a wonderful eye, Kelvin-sama. This is an estate that we recommend with great confidence.”

“My king, the good man called it a house, but...this is more of a mansion, is it not?”

“Well, it’s not too small. Good choice, Kelvin!”

“I’m glad to see that your companions have taken a liking to it as well, Kelvin-sama. If I may be allowed to brag a bit, this is the largest property that our humble business is currently handling.”

Sera’s impression was...well, let’s chalk it up to her being a former princess. This last remaining estate was on the very high end of the kinds of residences available in the city of Parth. Just as Gerard said, it looked like the kind of place that would house a noble family.

“The front gate has been unlocked, Kelvin-sama. Please let me show you around.”

When the gate swung open, the first thing that came into view was a garden graced with a fountain of clear, refreshing-looking water. Considering how spacious it was, the area seemed perfect for outdoor parties.

When we stepped into the building itself, we were greeted by a grand foyer. As it was my first time seeing such an impressive sight firsthand, I found myself feeling slightly overwhelmed.

“In terms of layout, the first floor has a bath, a kitchen, a dining room, and eight empty rooms. The second floor, accessible through the grand staircase in the foyer, has seven empty rooms. There is also a storage basement.”

Gerard sent me a can-you-actually-afford-a-place-like-this look, but the fact was, I did have the funds to buy it. Furthermore, there was a very particular reason I had taken an interest in this house.

“I want to see the bath.”

The two other properties that we’d viewed the last time around had been very nice too, but only homes of this size or larger could afford the luxury of installing a bath. Apparently, there were secret hot springs in Toraj, but what with training the Heroes and everything else that had happened, I’d never had a chance to visit them. Consequently, I was now seriously craving a bath.

“As you wish. The bath in this mansion is spacious enough for several people to use it at once. I’m sure you will love it.”

We were given a thorough tour of the place, after which we eventually ended up back in the lobby.

“And that is the entirety of the house,” the realtor concluded. “How do you like it, Kelvin-sama?”

“I want to hear everyone’s opinions. What do you guys think?”

“The kitchen is quite wonderful. I am happy with this property, Master.”

Of course Efil’s highest priority would be the kitchen. From what I saw, the one here is at least on par with the Fairy’s Song. I’m glad it meets her

standards.

“No objections from me, my king. I like that there is a big garden for me to train in.”

If Gerard is going to be training there, then I suppose I should reinforce it. I do have an idea about the training space, though.

“The farthest room on the right side is mine!”

Forget expressing her approval or disapproval of the place, Sera’s already gone ahead and chosen her room! I guess I can take that as an approval...right?

I smiled wryly and turned towards the realtor. “I guess that’s that. We’ll take it.”

And with that, I secured myself a beautiful new home only three months after transmigrating to this world.



Immediately after purchasing the house itself, our group headed off to buy all the things we would need for our new mansion. Gerard parted with us along the way, as it was supposedly time for his daily training. Efil and Sera chose the furniture, which I temporarily stored inside Clotho along with the other necessities we were picking up.

As we were currently inside the city, we had donned our Efil-made casual wear instead of our usual battle getup. Efil was wearing an unbelievably high-specced version of the white summer dress that she had chosen for our last date, while Sera had on a Chinese-style dress. *I swear I didn’t force them to wear these because of my own preferences. I, Kelvin, do not lie.*

“We’ll definitely need this, Kelvin!”

“That’s the fifth time I’m hearing those words today. What would you even use a pendant from a souvenir store for?”

During our shopping trip, I could not let down my guard for even a moment, as Sera would start badgering me to buy the most random things. The previous item had been a piano, of all things. We did indeed have plenty of money, but spending frivolously was not conducive to Sera’s education. *I...think we’re still educating her, right? In any case, over-pampering her is not good. Nope, I’m not going to buy it for you even if you press those wonderful breasts of yours against my arm. I’m different from that doting father of yours!*

“But it looks so curious and unusual. What a waste...”

“Just about everything looks unusual to you! Be stricter about choosing what you actually do and don’t want.”

“Ugh, all right.”

Sera’s personality was generally quite forceful, but for some reason, she would listen to what I said. *I’m glad to have such an understanding Follower.*

“Master, should we perhaps purchase a few more sets of dinnerware in case we have to entertain guests?”

“That’s a good idea. Let’s go and check some out. Sera, feel free to pick out a set for yourself.”

“Leave it to me! It’ll be a piece of cake!” she answered confidently with her hands on her hips, looking extremely happy.

I’m glad that her mood improves at the drop of a hat. Well, I guess I could consider getting her a piano one of these days. She does have the Performance skill at a pretty high rank, if I remember correctly. It would also serve as a nice piece of decor, so I suppose it wouldn’t be an entirely useless purchase.

Thanks to the recommended stores suggested by the realtor, we quickly proceeded to knock out everything on our list with an impressive smoothness. Of course, part of the credit also went to Efil for having written out the shopping list beforehand, and to Sera, for actually helping out properly during the second half of the trip. In short, we were all done by lunchtime.

“So, we’ve got everything we want?”

“Yes, Master. We’ve acquired all of the essentials now. Clo-chan, thanks for carrying everything.”

I nodded in agreement. “We’re really glad for your help, Clotho. Without you, it would be a huge undertaking getting all the furniture inside.”

Thanks to the convenience of Clotho’s Storage, we wouldn’t have to bother with the task of lugging furniture through the front door and up the stairs. After all, we could simply walk into the room where we wanted each item to be placed and ask Clotho to remove it then and there.

“All that’s left to do is grab our luggage at the inn, then. It feels like we’ve been in Clare’s care for the longest time.”

“Let’s properly pay her our respects as new neighbors, too,” added Efil. “After all, our house and the Fairy’s Song are within walking distance of each other. Even after we settle down, let’s go visit her from time to time.”

“I’ve been thinking the same thing. Once we have everything sorted out, let’s host a party to celebrate the new home and invite her along with the others. I’ll be counting on you when the time comes.”

“Yes, Master! I will do my very best!” After all, Clare was Efil’s mentor and master in the ways of cooking. I was already looking forward to the plump proprietress’s face when she took a bite of Efil’s food.

“By the way, Kelvin,” interjected Sera. “Aren’t you going to hire servants?”

“Servants? We already have Efil, don’t we?”

“You plan on making Efil take care of a mansion that size all by herself? And she’s coming along with us when we go on subjugation quests and dive into dungeons too, right? What will become of the house then?”

“Oh, you have a point. Sorry, I haven’t actually thought that far ahead.” *To think that I would be chided by Sera of all people...but the concern she raises is valid. I’m in the wrong for assuming we would never have to worry about the housework as long as Efil was around.*

“If I work hard enough —”

Sera shook her head. “Efil, keep the self-sacrificing to a minimum, all right? When it comes to Kelvin, you really do have a tendency to lose sight of everything else.” She shot a look at me and added, “Though, admittedly, part of the reason for that is Kelvin himself is clueless about a lot of things.”

Ugh, I don’t have anything to say in my defense!

“I’m sorry, Efil, for almost having shoved such a heavy burden onto your shoulders. Sera, thank you for pointing it out.”

“I’m also sorry for having overestimated my own capabilities. Thank you for your consideration, Sera-san.”

“It’s all good! I’m quite obtuse when it comes to the world myself. It’s give and take!” Sera nodded as if it really wasn’t anything of consequence.

Wow, now she looks like a reliable older sister. Yeah, I was completely in the wrong this time.

“I’ll go post a recruitment notice at the guild, then. How many people do you want, Efil?”

“I believe two would be enough.”

“Gotcha. I’ll arrange for it.”

If we’re getting more servants, does it mean I should officially install Efil as Head Maid? Guess I should give that a bit of thought as well. For now, let’s grab our stuff from the Fairy’s Song and say goodbye to Clare. Hopefully Uld will be there too.



When we reached the Fairy’s Song, we found Gerard already there, digging enthusiastically into his lunch. The sight reminded us that we had yet to eat lunch ourselves. As for Uld...well, daylight was a precious resource for adventurers.

“Ah, there you are, my king. That was rather fast.”

“Yeah, the shopping trip went smoothly. The only thing left is to retrieve our belongings.”

“Did I hear that right? You’ve already found a place, Kel-chan?” asked Clare, poking her head out from behind the counter.

“Mhm, we’ve gotten the key from the realtor. We’re thinking of

finishing up the move today.”

“Today, huh? I’m very glad for you, but things sure are going to get lonely around here.”

“We may be moving, but our house is literally just a few minutes’ walk away. We’ll still drop by.”

Clare laughed merrily. “I’ll look forward to the visits! All right, this calls for a celebration! Efil-chan, I’ll be teaching you a special recipe. Come around to the kitchen with me!”

“I-Immediately!”

In high spirits, both Clare and Efil disappeared into the back. Soon enough, the sounds of vegetables being chopped and pots boiling filled the room.

“Oh, my, what a wonderful smell. Looks like lunch is going to be worth looking forward to,” Sera muttered.

“Anything made by Clare-san and Efil is always worth looking forward to, isn’t it? As for the rest of us, let’s take this opportunity to finish packing our things. Sera, I’m sorry, but can you take care of Efil’s stuff too?”

“Me? Why don’t you do it yourself? You two are sharing a room, aren’t you? I think you probably know better than me where she puts everything.”

“There are things like underwear and such, right? I’d appreciate it if you could do it, being a girl yourself.”

“I don’t think Efil would mind. Don’t you get to see her every night in her un—?!”

I clapped a hand over Sera’s mouth in a panic. *What the hell are you saying in public?! I thought my heart was going to jump out of my chest!*

“I myself don’t have that much luggage. Want me to carry everything, my king?”

“We’ve got Clotho, so there’s no need. We can literally just stroll over with empty hands.”

“Oh, right, that is an option.”

“Mmmm! Mmmm!” In other words, “*Kelvin! I get the message already, so let me go!*”

“All right, all right,” I said, removing my hand and stepping back. *And since no one else is going to do it, I’m going to pat myself on the back for understanding what Sera’s muffled noises meant.*

“Gosh! You didn’t have to get *that* embarrassed!”

“You should be more conscious of this thing called ‘public image,’ especially in light of how conspicuous we’ve become nowadays.” *What are you going to do if unsavory rumors about us start spreading around?*

“Is that how it is? Aren’t adventurers *supposed* to be conspicuous?”

“Only in a good way. Just now was clearly a bad way.”

As we continued our exchange, Efil came out with the finished meal in hand. *All right, after we have lunch, we'll wrap up the last part of the moving process. Let's do this!*



"That was a revolutionary culinary experience! Who would have thought Clare still had such an ace up her sleeve!" exclaimed Sera.

"Mmm...I have lived a long life, but that taste just now was a first even for me," Gerard agreed.

We were heading for our new house after bidding farewell to the inn that we had grown so used to, and could talk of nothing but the secret recipe that Clare had passed on to Efil. Apparently, Clare had known how to cook curry all along. It had been incredibly delicious, despite having been served with bread and not rice. Clearly, all of my companions had loved it as well.

"During our lesson, Clare-san mentioned that this 'curry' dish originated in another world. Supposedly, the recipe itself was recorded in documents dating very far back."

"That means you knew of this dish all along, Kelvin?!"

"Well, yes, but I know literally nothing about cooking, so..."

Despite having transmigrated from modern Japan, I had pretty much no experience whatsoever with cooking. Reproducing a recipe from the mismatched bits and pieces of knowledge inside my mind was impossible, even at Efil's skill level. In light of that, the Japanese cuisines that I had encountered in Toraj and Clare's curry were priceless treasures to me.

"Efil, next time, let's have that curry over rice. It's definitely going to be delicious."

"Th-The thought never even occurred to me. As expected of Master!" Efil looked at me, her eyes sparkling with respect.

Muahaha, now that she knows the recipe for the curry itself, the rest is child's play. There are any number of ways to have curry, after all. Add Efil's Cooking skill to the picture, and we'll be set for life!

As our starting point and destination weren't all that far from each other, we soon found ourselves at our new home.

"I'm back!" I said to no one in particular, stepping over the threshold.

"Welcome back, Master," replied Efil, ever the loyal maid.

Sera almost missed her step. "Uh...what was that supposed to be?"

"I just wanted to try doing that. Thanks for playing along, Efil," I chuckled. "All right, everyone. First order of business: we have to decide on our rooms. As the realtor said this morning, there are a total of fifteen rooms between the first and second floors. Before we start converting some of them to things like lounges and studies and so on,

let's get the distribution of our own bedchambers sorted out first."

"The one farthest back and on the right is mine!"

"Why the obsession with that particular room?"

"Cause it's a corner room and has the most sunlight!"

A demon caring about sunlight? Moreover, "most" rather than "least" sunlight?

"I have no particular preference. Please decide for me, Master."

"With the amount of space we have, there's no need to hold back. Feel free to speak your mind."

"Um, in that case...I think I, um, would like a room close to Master's..." Efil managed with a red face, averting her eyes.

What is this cute creature? Here, have some head pats. "All right, then. Guess I'll choose my room first."

"I-If you please..."

When I turned to ask Gerard about his preference, I found him giving me a big thumbs up. *Let's just ignore him.*

"Please don't ignore me, my king!"

"Wow, such silence. I can't hear a thing."

"I apologize, my king! I'm in the wrong!"

"All right, all right. So, which room do you want?"

"That one's fine with me," he replied, pointing to one close by.

"Really? Right near the front door? You sure about that?"

"I don't really mind *where* it is as long as I have a place to sleep. In addition, the proximity to the main entrance will allow me to react immediately should any threats arise."

Ohhh, what a knightly thing to say. Guess we'll be counting on you if something does happen.

"Lastly, Clotho. Whi—"

Before I could finish my question, the slime had already altered its shape to point towards the door.

"You mean...outside? But we have plenty of rooms."

Clotho jiggled vigorously, giving the impression of shaking its head.

"Master, Clo-chan is a monster who originally lived out in the open. I believe it is trying to say that, instead of living indoors in one of the rooms, being outside suits its nature better."

"Is that right?"

Clotho skillfully indicated confirmation by contorting its body. Well, this mansion did come with a rather sizable garden. Hopefully, it was wide enough for my buddy not to feel cramped. Thankfully, Clotho had plenty of common sense, and could be trusted not to cause much trouble.

"Gotcha. Then use the garden as you like. Just tell me if you ever feel like you want a room, all right?"

“What about you?” asked Sera. “You haven’t chosen yours yet.”

“Right, my room is —”

“Sera, lass, is there even a need to ask? The bedchamber of the lord of a mansion is always in the same area, isn’t it? Namely, the safest part of the property.”

“Ohh, the one farthest back, on the left side of the second floor? I remember it being bigger than the rest. And the only way to get there is to pass by my door, so I guess it really is safe!”

“Gahaha! I know, right?”

“Which means Efil’s room will be between Kelvin’s and mine!”

“I would like that very much,” Efil replied. She turned to give me a deep bow. “I hope to prove a good neighbor, Master.”

“Oh, er, sure, me too...”

To be honest, I had actually wanted the room closest to the underground storage area, but I had completely missed the opportunity to say that. Gerard, who still hadn’t learned his lesson, was giving me *two* thumbs up now. I could almost swear that his teeth were glinting with a bright smile behind his helmet.

Sera, who was copying Gerard by offering a thumbs up of her own — *don’t pick up weird habits from the grandpa!* — asked, “So, are we done with room selection?”

“Yeah, let’s move on to unpacking. Clotho, buddy, we’ll be counting on you.”

“Clo-chan, let’s start in the dining room, shall we?” Efil suggested, giving the slime a rub.

Oh, right, I have to post a recruitment notice at the Adventurer’s Guild. Even so, it’ll probably take some time before we get any applicants, so I’ve got to properly support Efil until then. As for how much to pay the servants...let’s ask Ange what the market price is when we drop by the guild.

We managed to pull off the incredible feat of finishing our unpacking by the end of the day. I dove into the comfort of my new bed filled with a warm sense of achievement and promptly fell into a deep sleep. Visiting the guild was going to be a task for tomorrow’s Kelvin to take care of.



“What? We already have applicants?”

Two days after I posted the ad, I was called to the guild by Ange and informed of the surprising news.

“Yep! Your request is for two servants, right? Both slots were filled this morning. They’re available to meet you for an interview today, actually. What do you want to do?”

“That sounds perfect. Please arrange it.”

“Sure thing. I’ll send them over to your place, so you can wait for them back at home.”

“Thanks. Oh, and I’ll be inviting you to my new house one of these days, so make sure you come!”

“R-Really?! I’ll come; you’ll definitely see me there! I’ll be looking forward to it!” For some reason, Ange’s response was extremely enthusiastic.

“Hahaha, don’t be too surprised by Efil’s cooking!”

Friends really are a great thing to have.



Once back at the mansion, Efil and I hurriedly got the parlor all set up in preparation for the coming interviews. When things were more or less ready, Efil went to stand by the door, I settled myself onto the long sofa, and Gerard took up his position behind me. Sera was currently out, so I telepathically gave her the news.

Ugh, I’m quite nervous. This is my first time actually hiring someone, isn’t it? Is it always this nerve-racking being on the interviewing side? Here’s hoping I can pull it off well! I mean, I have Nerves of Steel, so it should be fine, right?

At that moment, there was a knock on the door.

“Master, I’ve brought the applicants.”

“Yes, come in.”

“Excuse me.”

Efil opened the door and stepped into the room, followed by the two candidates.

Wait a moment. These two...

“Master, this is Ellie-sama and Ruka-sama.”

“Thank you for the opportunity. I am Ellie.”

“We meet again, Big Brother! It’s been a while!”

The two who had responded to our recruitment post were none other than the mother and daughter we had saved from Black Wind back in Toraj. Seeing me, the little girl, Ruka, immediately broke into a dash and leaped into my arms. *Whoa! Good catch, me.*

“Ruka! You shouldn’t do that! We didn’t come here to play!”

“But it’s Big Brother! And I haven’t seen him in so long!”

“H-Hold on a moment, guys. I, uh, what exactly is happening?”

I had prepared myself for whoever might walk through the door, but seeing this pair had really taken me by surprise.

“What are you saying, Big Brother? You’re looking for servants, right? We came here today for the interview!”

“That’s not what I meant. I...in the first place, don’t you live in Toraj? It’s only been two days since I posted the notice. How did you manage to reach Parth in such a short time?”

When I headed for Toraj in a wagon, it took me weeks. I mean, just...what?!

“I was visiting the Adventurer’s Guild in Toraj in hopes of finding employment when I saw your notice, Kelvin-sama. When I was told that the location was in Parth, I was inclined to give up, but then Mist-san approached me...”

“It only took a second! It was, like, *bwooon*, and we were suddenly in Parth!”

“You guys took the teleportation gate?! ” *Weren’t there a whole lot of conditions supposedly required for someone to use it?!*

“Before anything else, Kelvin-sama, please allow me to pass this along to you. It’s a letter from our queen.”

“From Tsubaki-sama, you say?”

I accepted a rolled-up scroll from Ellie. True enough, the wax seal on it bore the national emblem of Toraj. I quickly scanned the contents. To paraphrase:

I heard from Rio that you’re looking for servants. It just so happens that I was about to send a few sacks of rice your way, so I thought I might as well include some eager applicants together with the rice. No pressure; if you don’t hire them, Rio will send them back. Of course, you needn’t thank me. Well, if you really want to thank me, how about coming back to serve Toraj? There’s no need to be reserved; the doors will always remain open to you and y— (the following lengthy solicitation has been abridged).

“I...see.”

In other words, Tsubaki-sama had yet to give up on her attempts to recruit us. She sure knows how to play the long game. And if I have to guess, she’s most likely in contact with both Rio and Mist.



“Master, it seems like several bags of rice have arrived from Tsubaki-sama. Um...and for some reason, Sera-san is part of the delivery group.”

“Oh, those must be the porters we accompanied through the teleportation gate,” Ellie remarked. “We happened to bump into Sera-sama along the way, and she very generously offered to help. She really is strong, isn’t she?”

In response to Ellie’s account, I looked out the window and saw Sera arriving with sacks of rice tucked under both arms. “Kelvin, I’m back! Look, we got more rice!”

Here I was, wondering what she was doing and why she hadn’t responded to my telepathic message. Turns out she was carrying rice!

“How do you want me to handle the porters, Master?”

“Set out some cold drinks and a light meal for them as thanks for having helped to carry everything all this way. If it’s your cooking, I’m sure they’ll be delighted.”

“Understood, Master.”

Sera strolled in just as Efil exited the room. “We’ve put everything away. So, how’s the interview going?”

“Thanks for getting the rice all sorted out. The interview...hasn’t really started, but, well, I guess I’m ready to hire them.”

“Really?!” cried Ruka, leaping up with joy.

“A-Are you sure about this, Kelvin-sama? We haven’t actually said anything yet...”

“We already talked for a whole day on the way back to Toraj, didn’t we? I think I have a pretty good grasp of your personalities. I’d trust you two more than I would somebody I’m meeting for the first time.”

Ellie seemed like she would be a diligent worker who wouldn’t cause me much trouble. Ruka was still young and not very well educated, but had a lot of potential for growth. If she worked hard under Efil’s instruction, she could grow into a very fine maid indeed.

“Then it’s decided?” Sera’s face broke into a huge smile. “That means tonight, Efil is cooking a feast in celebration, right?”

“I have no objections either, my king. Ruka, feel free to call me ‘Grandpa,’ all right?”

“Umm...Grandpa Gerard?”

“Oh!!! What is this feeling that’s welling up inside of me?!”

Are you really trying to be a friendly neighborhood grandpa, Gerard? In that grim-looking full body armor of yours?

“Ahem. In any case, the two of you are hired as of now. As I wrote on the notice, this is a live-in job. Once Efil comes back, she’ll show you to your room. You two don’t mind sharing, being family and all?”

“It’s more than generous! Normally, servants have to sleep in one big room together with a large number of people. The promised salary is also quite high. Are you sure about this, Kelvin-sama?”

“If it bothers you, then let me put it this way: I’m paying you a high salary to get quality work. As for you, Ruka, I don’t expect you to be able to do everything from the start, but I do expect you to study hard, all right?”

“I’ll give it my all!”

“I’m very sorry for my daughter’s overly casual tone and word choices, Kelvin-sama. I promise I’ll teach her properly.”

This is the sort of thing that everyone picks up over time, anyway, although I can see how it would be a matter of concern as a servant. Well, Ruka is still a kid, so I’m happy enough for her to put in whatever effort can be expected of someone her age.

“I’m sure both of you are quite tired today, what with the new environment and the move. As such, your duties will start tomorrow. Of course, you should feel free to use your room however you want. Oh, and Efil will be making your work clothes, so make sure to get measured. Then, next is...”

Once I had finished going through most of what needed explaining, Efil returned.

“There you are, Efil. Good timing.”

“What is the matter, Master?”

“I’m appointing you Head Maid, effective immediately. These two are now officially your charges. Take good care of them.”

“I humbly accept the honor.”



Ellie and Ruka’s welcoming party was long over, and it was getting late into the night now. Alone in my room and relying solely on the light of the moon for illumination, I was absorbed in flipping through the pages of a book that I had only just picked up. Judging from the absence of noise coming from the room next to mine, Efil had already fallen asleep.

Just as I was about to stand up to grab a cup of water, I felt the flow of a magical presence that I knew all too well.

“Took you quite a while, Melfina.”

::You were waiting up for me?::

The voice that I was hearing through the Follower Network was undoubtedly the goddess’s.

“I can’t explain it, but I had a hunch you were returning today,” I laughed welcomingly. “And voilà, here you are.”

From an outsider’s perspective, I must have looked like a weirdo laughing to myself.

::Looks like every time I step away, you become less and less human.::

“Oh, hush.”

I wasn't dreaming it; my precious companion was back. It felt like it had been ages since I could banter with her like this.

::I'm sorry; adjusting my artificial body took longer than expected.::

“Don't worry about it. I don't know exactly what this artificial body of yours is, but the point is, I can Summon you now, right?” *The time has finally come. The past three months felt like an eternity.*

::Indeed. And I'm all ready to catch your heart, honey.::

“That...is a pretty dated phrase.”

Come to think of it, this is going to be the first time — in memory, at least — that I'm meeting Melfina in person. Am I a bit nervous?

“In the first place, you're basically just tagging along with me as part of an extended holiday, right? It sounds like your goal has kind of gotten off-track.”

::Not at all. To my surprise, it seems I actually took a liking to you somewhere along the way.::

“You know, I'm still not sure whether I believe that whole thing about me falling for you at first sight.”

::And now you can see for yourself. Go ahead!::

“All right, all right...”

At the moment, my max MP was 2,625. After subtracting what was needed to keep the other Followers materialized, I was left with 2,045. By some odd coincidence, this was the exact amount from the last time I had tried — and failed — to Summon Melfina. *Would it be enough this time?*

I focused my mind and gathered magic above the bed before my eyes. *Preparations, all okay. Only thing left to do is actually perform the Summoning.*

A magic circle appeared in mid-air, and bluish white light enveloped the room. Soon enough, the light turned into pure white wings before fading away into fine rays.

“So...what do you think?” asked the angelic woman who was now hovering over my bed. Clad in blue armor, with a long spear of the same color in hand, she was a war goddess in the flesh, pristine and entirely free of blemishes. Melfina's features appeared around high school age and were the perfect combination of cuteness and beauty to evoke a sense of sublime majesty. Her face was framed by hair that glowed bluish white under the moonlight and reached all the way to her waist. Every time her white wings beat the air, a wave of divine energy washed over the room.

“P-Passably to my liking, I suppose.”

The goddess giggled and replied, "Is that so?"
I realized once again just how much I sucked at lying.



"Aaahh, I finally get to taste Efil's cooking!" exclaimed Melfina.
"It's every bit as amazing as I imagined!"

"Even after raising her Cooking skill to Rank S, her food is getting more delicious by the day," I said proudly. "The word 'complacent' just isn't in my remarkable maid's vocabulary."

"Thank you for the compliment, Master. However, I am only doing what any maid would do."

"Mm! Today's food is as wonderful as always! Efil, seconds, please!"

"Here you go, Sera-san."

"....."

The morning after I had successfully Summoned Melfina, my party was enjoying breakfast together in the dining room. With me, Efil, Gerard, Sera, Clotho, and now Melfina present, the whole "family" was finally in attendance.

"But still, a mansion," remarked Melfina, raising her face to give the room a quick once-over. "I was rather surprised to find that your room at the inn had been vacated. It took me quite a while to find this place."

I shot her a look. "You could have just reached out through the Network, you know."

"That would have been a waste of an opportunity for a touching reunion, don't you think? I really wanted to surprise you!"

"What, like an episode of *Punk'd*?"

"....."

What a weird thing for a goddess to get hung up on. And why's Gerard been so quiet this whole time? Is something wrong? "Gerard, you haven't said a single word since the meal started. Do you have a stomachache or anything?"

"No, that's not it. Um, my king...who is this pretty lady?"

"Yeah, now that Gerard's mentioned it...who're you?" asked Sera quizzically. "Haven't seen your face around here before."

Oh right, I've only introduced her to Efil so far. Sera came in and joined the conversation so naturally that it completely slipped my mind.

"Apologies for my belated greeting. Is 'nice to meet you' appropriate here? In any case, I am a fellow Follower who was Summoned just yesterday. My name is Melfina."

"Princess?!" Gerard exclaimed.

"Indeed, that's me," Melfina replied in her characteristic sing-song voice.

You've actually come to like that nickname, haven't you...

"Ah, so you're Melfina," said Sera. "Sorry I didn't recognize you; I didn't know what you looked like. Glad to have you back, I guess. Welcome back!"

"Thanks! I'm glad to be here." The two women exchanged a handshake, but Melfina's face was slightly clouded. "I imagine you might not think the best of me over what happened to Demon Lord Gustav —"

"Nah, don't worry about it. That was the result of my father becoming overly obsessed with power and running amok. And it wasn't even you who handled the Summoning of the Hero of that age, was it? I heard the whole story from Kelvin. So there's nothing bad between us!"

Melfina heaved a sigh of relief. "Thank you."

"Oh, pssh, there's nothing to thank me for," Sera replied, waving her hand dismissively.

Phew, I'm glad there's no bad blood between the goddess and the demon. Looks like I was worried about nothing, seeing as the two of them are breaking the ice just fine.

"And here I was thinking my king had brought in a new concubine! So, it *won't* be raining blood today. What a relief!"

"Dude, why do you always jump to that sort of conclusion?!"

"Don't worry, Gerard," said Melfina smugly, "I'm the main wife, and I'm here now!"

"Pfft!" I spat out the mouthful of milk that I'd been drinking. *Where the hell did your serious mood from just now go, Melfina?!*

"C'mon, Kelvin! That's gross!" Sera cried, after successfully evacuating the dishes from the table at top speed.

"Master, allow me," offered my faithful maid as she approached with a napkin to wipe my mouth for me.

"Sorry, and thanks." I obediently lifted my face.

"So, you really are betro—"

"No! She's just making it up like she always does!"

"Becoming so flustered over such a small matter means that you still have a long way to go, honey."

"You sure seem to be having fun stirring things up..."

Looks like she's in quite high spirits after finally being materialized. If only she would have her fun without getting me into trouble, though.

"By the way, Melfina, is it a problem if we continue to call you by your name?" asked Sera. "Everyone knows who Goddess Melfina is, after all. Luckily, the servants happened to be out on an errand this morning, so we're in the clear for now, but still."

"Good point. This is the perfect opportunity to discuss it. Let me share the Status of this artificial body with you all," the goddess

replied before uploading her Status window to the Follower Network.
“This is me in my battle-ready state.”

Mel (17 y/o, Female, Angel, Valkyrie)

Level: 86

Title: Resonator

HP: 900/900 (+ 635)

MP: 900/900 (+ 635)

Strength: 900 (+ 814)

Endurance: 900 (+ 814)

Agility: 900 (+ 814)

Magic: 900 (+ 814)

Luck: 900 (+ 814)

Equipment: Holy Spear Luminary (Rank S), Valkyrie Mail (Rank S),
Valkyrie Helm (Rank S), Ether Greaves (Rank A)

Skills: Divine Binding (Hidden Skill: Hidden from Analyze Eye),
Sympathetic Resonance (Unique Skill), Spear Mastery (Rank S), Blue
Magic (Rank S), White Magic (Rank S), Alchemy (Rank S)

Passive Effects: Summoning/Magic Supply (Rank S)

“Hold on; there’s way too much here to comment on!”

“Well, it is an artificial body, after all. Feel free to voice your
comments one by one.”

“Oh, um, all right, then.”

I listed each of my questions in turn, and Melfina patiently
answered them all. First, her unnaturally uniform stats were
apparently set up to be reflective of my own. Specifically, the value
for each was the average of all my stats after the buffs from any stats-
raising skills were accounted for.

“That is the effect of my Unique Skill, Sympathetic Resonance.
Not only are my stats attuned to yours, but so are my level and skill
points. If you pick up a buff or a debuff, it will affect me equally as
well. Consequently, me acquiring a stats-boosting skill, like Herculean
Strength, for example, would be entirely meaningless. Similarly, I do
not get the stats buffs from your Summoning skill.”

“Sounds like a skill with its fair share of merits and demerits. Why
did you choose this one?”

“All artificial bodies come with Divine Binding — a Hidden Skill
that residents of this world have absolutely no way of detecting — in
order to limit the powers of the deity dwelling within. Naturally, this
body is no exception.”

Divine Binding supposedly worked to restrict the stats boosts and
skill points earned by leveling up, ensuring the artificial body would
only ever be as powerful as an average resident of the world. This was

a measure taken to prevent gods and goddesses from overly affecting the worlds that they visited. There were several other more detailed restrictions imposed by the skill, but at least the stats part could be overcome with the help of Sympathetic Resonance. In other words, Melfina was exploiting a loophole. The stronger I got, the stronger she would become. The skill points that she earned would be equal to mine as well, which meant that she actually had quite a pool of them still sitting untouched.

“More importantly, we are now even closer to becoming one in both body and soul!” Melfina continued.

“Oh great, ‘honey.’”

“What a perfect monotone delivery.”

All that’s left to discuss is her name, I guess. “So, this artificial body goes by ‘Mel’ and not ‘Melfina.’”

“I believe that takes care of the problem, right? Everyone, going forward, please call me ‘Mel’ when addressing me out loud.”

I nodded. “A simple but easy to remember nickname. Gotcha.”

Efil bowed in acknowledgment. “Understood, Mel-sama. I will also inform Ellie and Ruka when they get back.”

“Thank you, Efil,” Melfina replied with a grateful look.

Guess I’ve got to be careful when speaking to Melfina in public. Wait, hold on, about her age —

“Did you want to say something? Honey?”

I gulped. “Nope, nothing at all.”

My Danger Detection skill was blaring an alarm in response to her full-faced smile. *All right, age is taboo. Never touch on it, never bring it up, never mention it. I mean, she looks seventeen, so let’s leave it at that, right? Yes, that’s that.*

“Well then, that’s enough about me, don’t you think? Next is the blessing that I promised to grant you a while back.”

“Right, for when I successfully Summoned you. I remember.”

“That’s right. Well done. Here you go, have a flower.” Melfina used her index finger to draw a flower onto the back of my right hand.

“Agh, that tickles! But being praised does make me happy.”

“There you are. Now you have my blessing.”

“Wait, just like that?” *The ritual is to doodle on my hand?*

“What I’ve just granted you is the Blessing of the Goddess of Reincarnation. It’s the same one possessed by the Oracle of Deramis.”

“What is its effect?”

“There are two. The first is that once a month, you will receive absolute protection against something that would otherwise kill you. This activates automatically in the case of unforeseen accidents or sneak attacks that you fail to see coming.”

Damn, that first effect is already plenty OP on its own! Although

there was a lengthy cooldown time between uses, the benefit of having some insurance against fatal attacks was obvious. To avoid letting our skills get rusty, Gerard, Sera, and I had taken to having practice matches with each other as of late. While these were, again, *practice* matches, we still took them quite seriously. As the one with the lowest Endurance, I was always somewhat in fear of losing my life. One did have to be alive to be a battle junkie, after all.

Not that I was a battle junkie.

“Good for you, Kelvin! Now we can kick things up another notch during our practice matches!”

Of course that’s your first thought, Sera. But no matter; I’ll take everything that gets thrown at me!

“You two, make sure to not go overboard, all right?” Efil chided Sera and, for some reason, me. “Don’t forget that the underground training area is right beneath the building.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

With Efil’s admonishment putting an end to the exchange, it was time to move on.

“The second effect...is the ability to summon a Hero using your own magic.”



“Good going, lass! Your moves have definitely gotten a lot sharper than before!”

“And you’re as sturdy as ever! Do you even know how many debuffs I’ve piled onto you?!”

Greatsword and fist clashed again and again, generating booms and shockwaves that reverberated throughout the training room below our new home. What had once been a wine cellar had, thanks to my Green Magic, been expanded so much that the space was now even larger than the house itself.

In addition to the training room, which was around the size of a school gymnasium and thoroughly coated with adamantite, this underground area also included my own personal forge and a multitude of other rooms...although some of them were still in various stages of construction.

“It looks like Gerard and Sera have grown quite strong. Do they often have practice matches like this?”

“Mhm. Around the time we defeated Viktor, we sort of ran out of opponents that could really hold their own against us. So every once in a while, we’ll train with each other this way. Most of the time, we do it round-robin.”

As we had learned during our expedition to Toraj, even Rank A

opponents no longer posed a threat to us, and we had only encountered a handful of Rank S monsters to date. Sparring between our party members ended up being pretty much the only option for keeping our skills up to snuff.

“It looks like Gerard’s pressing.”

“Well, his stats are a head above the rest of us, and he also has a whole lot more fighting experience. This is how it usually goes.”

Even Sera, who normally preferred a straightforward fighting style, found herself having to use various techniques and magic while facing off against the knight. And even then, her chances of victory were still quite slim. There was a marked difference in strength between her and Gerard. With both of them going all out and improving themselves day by day, it appeared that this power dynamic — which I personally thought was working out well for everyone involved — was going to stay as it was for quite a while longer.

“So, the Hero Summoning...”

“Is that a note of misgiving that I sense in your tone?”

“More bewilderment, if anything,” I replied. Honestly, I was at a loss as to how to use the ability that Melfina had given me this morning: the ability to summon a Hero. “In the first place, what is a Hero? Sure, they defeat Demon Lords, but can’t other people do the same? A Rank S adventurer, for example. Gaun’s Beast King is Rank S, isn’t he?”

“That’s — oh my.”

“Melfina, dodge.”

Sera sailed towards us, having been sent flying after failing to properly block one of Gerard’s attacks. Melfina and I took a step to the left and right, respectively, to avoid being knocked over as well.

“Gosh! And I was so close to getting to you!”

“Gahaha! It was indeed very close, but not quite close enough.”

Sera lay spread out on the ground, flailing her limbs a few times in frustration. This was a pretty rare sight in general, considering she was practically undefeated outside of our party. In here, though, it was a rather common occurrence.

“One more time! Just once more! I won’t lose this time!”

As Sera stormed past me, I gave her a light slap on the back.

“Here you go, have a Bright Heal. Good luck!”

“Thanks! Kelvin, watch me! I’ll win this time for sure!”

“Of course. I’m looking forward to it.”

With that, the demon took off like a bullet, heading back towards the knight. The two of them promptly resumed their fierce combat. It was clearly only a matter of time before the reinforced walls and floor of the training room would begin to suffer damage, but hey, gotta

strike while the iron is hot, right? By now, it was customary for Gerard to hang out with Sera when she was in the mood for some roughhousing. Then there would be a self-reflection session after the match.

“Sorry we were interrupted.”

“No worries. So, we were talking about why it has to be a Hero, right?”

Melfina raised a hand and gathered an orb of light above her palm. Eventually, the light took on a humanoid shape, floating in midair.

“Do you remember when I mentioned that the cyclical appearance of the Demon Lords is a natural phenomenon that can’t be changed?”

“Yeah, right before we fought Viktor.”

“To go into further detail, the whole process is deeply related to a specific skill. Without exception, every single Demon Lord throughout history has possessed that skill.” As Melfina flipped her hand, the figure of light scattered. “The name of that skill is Mara Pisuna. Strangely, nobody is ever born with this skill. It is when the soon-to-be Demon Lord amasses sufficient power that he or she suddenly comes into possession of it. Why or how this happens is still a complete mystery.”

“Sounds like a disease more than a skill.”

“That’s actually a good way of putting it. Here, honey, take a cushion.” Melfina pulled two floor cushions seemingly out of nowhere. I accepted the one that she was offering and sat on it.

“Here we go, oof. So, then, what does that skill actually do?”

“First, it changes the personality of its owner. It draws out and amplifies the malice in their heart. In other words, you can think of Demon Lords as completely different individuals from the people they originally were.”

“What a frightening skill...”

“You’re right; it’s an enormous pain to deal with. The precise conditions for obtaining it are not clear, but there is a strong tendency for it to be found in those who already possess some degree of malice. I don’t think it’s something you’d have to worry about for yourself, though.”

“Confirmation from a goddess! Now that’s reassuring. So, you said ‘first.’ I’m assuming this skill has additional effects?”

“It nullifies damage.”

“I’m sorry, what?”

“The skill completely nullifies all incoming damage. In other words, the bearer becomes invincible.”

Hold on, “invincible,” as in, actually invincible? The Demon Lord becomes unbeatable?!

Melfina read my expression perfectly. “That’s right. But that’s where the Hero comes in. Or, to be exact, it’s the power from an otherworldly source that’s the exception. The ‘otherness’ of a power possessed by someone from a different world acts to nullify the invincibility of the Demon Lord. As long as there is at least one Hero in the party, damage from the rest of the party members also bypasses the effect of the Demon Lord’s skill.”

“I see, so that’s why the Oracle of Deramis specifically summons otherworlders. But is there any point to the ‘Hero’ title? You make it sound like even my attacks would land on someone like that.”

“Yes, honey, your attacks would be effective as well. But you’ve got to remember, appearances are important. Both for politics and for religion. And, apparently, otherworlders tend to like this sort of thing too.”

“Ah, politics and religion. Fair enough.”

“Whether to follow along or not is entirely up to each otherworlder’s personal decision. After I bring them over, I’m hands-off. I don’t compel them to do anything.”

I guess that’s where the royalty and nobility and all come into play. Not that I have any intention of getting involved. Being manipulated and used for someone else’s agenda doesn’t sit well with me.

“It seems like you’re still quite conflicted, honey.”

“I’m not sure whether I should do it or not. After all, those people are Summoned against their wills, right? Just as the current generation of Heroes were?”

“That...is the case, yes. The target of the Summoning has no say in the matter.”

“Then —”

“If that’s what’s bothering you, I recommend that you go with transmigration summoning.”

“Transmigration” summoning?

“There are two ways of Summoning Heroes. One option is the way that Colette, the Oracle of Deramis, did it: she summoned living otherworlders. The other is to transmigrate the soul of an otherworlder who has already died.”

“Umm, what’s the difference?”

“Right, I’ll explain. First, the Summoner can choose how much magic to pour into the Summoning. The strength of the resulting Hero is proportionate to the amount of magic used. There is no limit on the number of individuals that can be summoned, but the overall strength is divided among them. Those who possess the Blessing of the Goddess of Reincarnation can only invoke this ability once and can only use their own magic for the process.”

Damn, so I can’t add my companions’ magic to my own, then.

“Summoning otherworlders is basically just teleportation, so that is essentially the low-cost option. Their skills and bonuses are distributed automatically based on their personal aptitudes. They don’t get to choose.”

“And that’s what Touya and the others went through.” *Low cost...so that’s how the Oracle of Deramis was able to afford bringing all four of them over. She sure got a bit greedy there.*

“On the other hand, transmigration Summoning requires much more magic, as it involves pulling over a soul that’s already died and providing it with a new body. Consequently, this method is not suitable for Summoning several individuals at once. In exchange, the person being Summoned has complete freedom to choose their skills and bonuses, which generally makes them quite a bit more powerful. Oh, and they can also change their age and appearance if they wish. Obviously, this is how you were summoned, honey.”

“Wait, my current appearance is different from my appearance before?” *This is news to me. I’m...not quite sure how I feel about it.*

“No, don’t worry; you didn’t alter either of those parameters for yourself. After all, doing so uses up skill points.”

“Oh, okay. Phew.” *I mean, if it costs SP, then yeah, I wouldn’t touch it.*

“So, does the option of transmigration Summoning allay your qualms?”

“I suppose so, yeah. One last thing...would I get to choose the soul being summoned?”

“I’m afraid not. When it comes to otherworlder Summoning, I, as the goddess, choose the targets. When it comes to transmigration Summoning, however, the target is entirely random. There is no way to tell who it is until the ritual is actually performed.”

Random. So there’s quite a bit of risk involved. Honestly, if we were to get a protagonist stereotype like Touya, I would probably go bald from stress along with Setsuna. That is the only situation that I’d like to be spared from. When looking at it that way, it’s a pretty big gamble. In the first place, do I even need to Summon a Hero? As an otherworlder, I can fight the Demon Lord myself, after all...

“There is no need to rush to make a decision, honey. It’s not as if the ability will disappear. Take all the time you need to think it through.”

“Thanks, I think I’ll do that.”

It would probably be a good idea to come back to this later with a fresh mind. I might get some good advice if I ask Efil and the others, too.

“Honey,” Melfina warned as she picked up her cushion as the match between Sera and Gerard reached its peak once more.

I quickly followed suit and stood up. “Again? Well, it’s around

lunchtime anyway. Let's get out of the way and wrap things up. Seems like Sera's reflection will be held over lunch today."

A moment later, I smoothly cast a recovery spell on Sera as she flew past us yet again. Apparently, she had been done in quite badly today, same as always. *She's probably going to be pretty vexed during the reflection session, too.*



Later that night, I gathered together all my companions in the underground training facility. After all, this was the safest place away from prying eyes.

"That was faster than I expected, honey. You made up your mind within a day?"

"I've finished consulting everyone, so there's no point in dragging it out any longer. I still have that promise to Gerard that I've yet to fulfill, so we can do with all the fighting strength we can gather. And if I can't control a single Hero...well, that'll show how much I'm worth."

After mulling over the matter and getting everyone's opinions, I had decided to go ahead with the Summoning. *Fingers crossed this Hero doesn't walk out on me.*

"Ellie, Ruka. I previously explained to you two that Master is a Summoner, yes? What he is about to perform is an extremely special kind of Summoning. We have no idea whether this will be someone who will join us as a companion, someone who might be our guest, or someone who's taken the wrong path in life. Regardless, make sure to carry yourselves in a way that would not bring shame to Master's name."

"Understood, Efil-san."

"Okay!"

Thanks to the outfits that Efil had tailored for them, both Ellie and Ruka now completely looked the part. Ellie had already taken up her duties as a maid, and the day when she fully grew into the role probably wasn't too far off. Ruka, on the other hand, was still only an apprentice. Per my instructions, both of them had already been informed that I was a Summoner.

"There's no need to wind yourselves up too much over this. Even if the Summoned person turns out to be a bad guy, they'll only be at Level 1 and wearing the most basic equipment. I would be able to defeat them as easily as taking candy from a baby."

"My king, when you say 'defeat,' do you mean...?"

"I'll defeat them and rehabilitate them, of course. By force, if needed. Letting someone with the strength of a Hero run amok and do whatever they want is far too dangerous."

“Hey, can we get this over with quickly?” asked Sera with a loud yawn. “I’m kinda sleepy.”

“I’m not surprised, given how long you were training...”

After two consecutive matches with Gerard in the morning, Sera had faced me, Clotho, and then Gerard again in the afternoon. Of course she would be tired. *And you hate losing that much? Seriously?*

“Thanks to the back-to-back fights, I feel like I’m on the verge of grasping something. Either way, let’s make it quick.”

“All right, all right. Unsummon!”

In order to maximize my MP, I returned Gerard, Sera, Clotho, and Melfina to my magic pool. After downing the MP recovery potion that Efil handed me, I was back to full magical strength.

Mel, please start.

::Very well. I will now perform the Summoning by the authority vested in you from the blessing. Please confirm the amount of MP that you wish to use and the number of individuals that you wish to summon::

Leave me only 1 MP and use the rest to summon a single person. If we’re doing this, I would rather have a strong Hero. Someone with half-assed strength wouldn’t be able to keep up with us, would they?

::All preparations are in order. Transmigration starting...now::

A gigantic magic circle appeared in the center of the training room, glowing with a faint white light that enveloped the place in a fantastical and mystical atmosphere. However, the process seemed to grind to a halt after that.

Uh...why is nothing happening?

::The Hero appears to be puzzling quite a bit over the skill selection::

Oh, right, you did mention that would happen. Hold on, doesn’t that mean we’ll be waiting for a while? I know I would take a whole day to choose my skills...

::Time flows differently in — aaaand, done. Interesting, no changes to appearance or age, just like you. And....::

And?

::No, never mind. There’s no point in describing someone you’re going to meet in just a moment. All right, look sharp!::

I turned towards the magic circle just in time to see its glow burst into a pillar of blinding light.



I, Saeki Ryo, was born with a weak constitution. After having contracted an incurable disease back before my earliest memories, I came to spend the majority of my life either in a hospital or in my own room at home. School? I rarely attended.

Naturally, there was no way for me to make friends, so being alone was the norm for me. I spent most of my waking hours either studying or reading novels. Almost all the stories that I picked up were adventure-themed ones. For me, able to do nothing but peer at the outside world through the window, these books were the only thing that kept me sane. The dream of one day being able to step outside and embark on my own exhilarating journey of a lifetime was what fueled me, what motivated me to hang in there throughout all the treatments.

However, it had all been in vain. The day before my fourteenth birthday, my condition suddenly took a turn for the worse. The curtains fell on my life just like that, as if it had been nothing but a disappointing joke.

What was the point of my life, anyway?

My eyes no longer saw anything. I was surrounded by darkness. Pure, silent darkness.

Is this life after death? I don't even care anymore...

I closed my eyes in self-abandonment. Surely, my consciousness was going to be wiped away soon enough.

Beep.

A sound that I did not recognize reached my ears. It did not sound like a noise that belonged in a world after death.

What was that?

When I opened my eyes, I found myself in the same dark void as before. However, one thing had changed.

Welcome to your new world!

What...is this?

There was a translucent slab in front of me with a flashing button. Like a puppet on strings, I found myself raising a hand to press it.

::Congratulations! As the result of a scrupulous and meticulous selection process, you have been granted the right to transmigrate to another world! Your soul will now be sent to the Acting Goddess of Reincarnation, where you will be given instructions for making the preparations for your brand-new life.::

Transmigration? Another world? As in, what I had read about in novels and longed for all my life?

It was as if a spark of life had passed through my deadened heart. I felt my consciousness being pulled forward.

After that, I met an angel who introduced herself as an “acting goddess” while her “boss was away” and listened to her grumble about her work for a while. I ended up taking quite a bit of time to choose my skills, but what does it say that the goddess’s rant had taken even longer than that?

However, I still enjoyed it quite a bit, as it had been a while since

I'd gotten to have a conversation. What I learned from her monologue was that this angel had a very irresponsible boss. I guess everyone has it rough in their own way.



Thud!

Something landed within the cloud of smoke that was emanating from the magic circle. I could tell that the silhouette was humanoid, but couldn't make out any other details.

Judging from the height, it appears to be...a child? It seems like we've at least avoided the worst case scenario of having an ultra bad criminal on our hands.

::With your Luck stat, there's no way you would get a bad draw, honey. This is sure to be someone who properly meets your needs::

I sure hope so.

The smoke cleared, revealing the figure of a young girl not even 150 cm tall. Her short hair was black, from which I gathered she was Japanese. With porcelain white skin and a slender build, she not only looked appropriately cute for her age, but clearly had plenty of potential to grow into a splend— *That's not what I should be focusing on right now!*

"Where...am I?" murmured the girl, trying to get her bearings. The traveler's outfit that she was wearing made me recall my own arrival to this world.

"First of all, it's nice to meet you. My name is Kelvin, and I'm an adventurer by trade. This place is a training room beneath my house. It might be a bit bare, but I hope you're not put off by that."

"A-Adventurer?! Oh, um, nice to meet you. My name is Saeki Ryo."



Ryo? Ryo...*this won't do — How can such a cute girl have a name that brings to mind a certain crafty middle-aged man? This is a serious problem!*

“Um, is what the angel said true? Have I really been transmigrated to another world?”

“Angel?”

::That would be the subordinate who's handling my duties at the moment.::

You shoved something this important onto your subordinate?!

::It's fine, it's fine. As they say, everything's an experience, right?::

Have you ever heard the phrase, “It's not what you say but how you say it”?

I turned my attention back to the newcomer. “I'm the one who called you to this world. Before anything else, I'm terribly sorry for reincarnating you at our conveni—”

“You're the one who brought me back to life?!”

“—ence?! Uh, yes. That was me, but...”

Ryo, who had been the very image of timidity only a second before, abruptly grabbed both of my hands and rushed in close to look me straight in the eye. *Uh, what is this extreme reaction? You startled me!*

“Thank you so much! Thank...just, *hic*, thank you...”

Next thing I knew, she had buried her face in my chest and was bawling her eyes out. *This is strange. I'm having a serious feeling of déjà vu right now.*

::My king...do you actually possess some sort of skill that makes girls cry when they meet you for the first time?::

I mean, I don't think I do...



“Yes, please! I'd love to! Please let me join your party!”

After calming Ryo down, I explained to her that she was now a transmigrator, just like me. From what she told us, becoming an adventurer had been something she'd always fantasized about in her previous life. The more I shared about this world, the brighter her eyes seemed to shine. When I finally asked her what she wanted to do going forward and officially invited her to join our party, she gave her answer without hesitation.

“You're sure you don't want more time to think about it? I mean, I'd love for you to join us, but...”

“Nope, I'm good. I'm very grateful to you, Kelvin-san, and I also want to repay this favor. I think I'd feel more at ease being allowed to stick with you. Um...as long as I wouldn't be a burden.”

“Well, if that’s how you feel, then I have nothing more to say. Welcome aboard!”

I offered my right hand, and Ryo shook it. As expected of someone her age, her hand was tiny and warm. *And now to introduce her to — oh, right, everyone’s still Unsummoned. Let’s ask Ellie to bring me some more MP potions. Ugh, there’s so much liquid just sloshing around in my stomach already...*

Upon sufficiently recovering my MP, I Summoned all of my Followers. The sudden appearances caused Ryo’s jaw to drop in astonishment.

“Ummm...that person’s sleeping, right?”

Ryo was pointing at the figure of Sera, who was splayed out on the ground, dead to the world.

Aaah, she must have fallen asleep while on standby inside my magic pool. Wordlessly, Efil retrieved a blanket from Clotho’s Storage and covered the demon.

“Yeah, that’s Sera. She’s quite tired today, so you two can meet properly tomorrow.”

The introductions to everyone else went ahead without a hitch. *And now, it’s time to resolve a very serious problem.*

“Ryo, there’s a bit of a problem with your name. Can we talk about it?”

“My name? Oh, because a Japanese name would draw unwanted attention in this world?”

“That’s not it. The name ‘Rio’ itself is quite common here. The problem is, it happens to be the name of the old man who’s serving as the city’s guildmaster.”

“That’s...okay, yeah, that’s a bit of a problem.”

I know, right? I’m sure that, as a girl, it would kind of bother you, wouldn’t it?

“If I had the Naming skill, I’d be able to help rename you, but picking it up seems like a waste of skill points. Plus, it turns your name blue and all.”

“Honey, there’s no need for that.”

“What do you mean?”

“Those who are transmigrated have the right to choose a new name for themselves. It seems that Ryo just hasn’t done it yet.”

“Oh, right, the angel mentioned that. I told her I’d hold off for the moment, because I didn’t know what kinds of names would be common in this world.”

“This is my first time hearing about it. I don’t remember anything of the sort when I first arrived.”

“In your case, honey, you changed your name *before* losing your memories.”

So, “Kelvin” is the name I picked for myself? “Ahhh...ahem, anyway, problem solved! Ryo, what kind of name would you want? Only royalty and nobility have family names in this world, so you can leave that out.”

“Mmm...in that case, I’ll go with Rion!”

“That’s...a nice name, but it’s not very different, is it?” *It’s basically the same pronunciation with an extra “n” at the end.*

“I dreamed countless times about being inside the stories that I read. In almost all of them, I used the name ‘Rion.’ It feels like the most natural choice to me.”

“I see. Then you’ll be Rion from today onwards. Um, Mel, how exactly does she change her name?”

“Please open your Status window, Rion. There should be an edit button next to your name. Do you see it?”

Rion opened her Status window. “Oh, you’re right.” After poking her screen a few times, she asked, “How’s that?”

I activated Analyze Eye.

Rion (14 y/o, Female, Human, Light Swordsman)

Level: 1

Title: Hero of Parth

HP: 20/20

MP: 23/23

Strength: 4

Endurance: 2

Agility: 7

Magic: 4

Luck: 3

Skills: Residual Slice (Unique Skill), Sword Mastery (Rank S), Acrobatics (Rank C), Companionship (Rank C), Vigor (Rank A), Double Growth Rate, Double Skill Points

Looks like she managed to change her name without a problem. What’s more surprising is how high her skills already are...and she’s got the doubling skills too! Her growth is definitely going to be a sight to see!

“Yep, all confirmed. You are now officially Rion. Did you discover the doubling skills on your own?”

“Mhm! I’ve read quite a few otherworld reincarnation novels that had skills to accelerate growth, so I searched for them just in case. I was really happy to find out this world actually had them! I also maxed out Sword Mastery, since it’s hard to go wrong with that one.”

“That was a good call. The merits of possessing the doubling skills at Level 1 are enormous. And it looks like you picked up a few others as well.”

“Oh, um, the rest I chose sort of as an over-response to my previous life. I mentioned that I was really sickly and that I died from an illness, right? That’s why I ended up spending quite a few points on Vigor. Then there’s Companionship, because I was worried about whether I would be able to make friends...”

As she continued to talk, Rion’s face gradually turned towards the ground. *Perhaps the trauma inside her is much deeper than I’d thought.*

“There’s no need to be ashamed of these choices. At a high enough rank, Vigor protects you not only from illness, but debuffs as well. And there’s no better skill than Companionship for conveying your feelings. In other words, it’s just a matter of *how* you use those skills to your advantage.”

Rion seemed to mull over my words before finally looking up with a bright smile. “Okay!”

I’m glad to see that her dark mood’s dissipated. Let’s give her another shot of liveliness!

“All right, then, once again — officially...ahem. Welcome to your new fantasy world, where swords clash and magic abounds! Rion, we’re glad to have you here!”

“Thank you!! I’m Rion, and I’m thrilled to be here! There’s still a lot that I have to learn, but I’ll do my best to catch up quickly! Thank you, everyone, for the warm welcome!”

We all clapped enthusiastically. And with that, our latest member had received a proper welcome, just as the day was ending.

Which means I don’t have to keep up this front any longer, right? My knees suddenly gave way, and I sat down on the ground, hard.

“Master?!”

“My king?!”

“Don’t worry, I’m all right. It’s just that with my MP running on empty, it was taking all I had to remain upright.”

A feeling of fatigue more fierce than anything I had ever experienced was raging through my body. *Come to think of it, I’ve never used up this much of my MP at once before.* Although it was not a physical kind of fatigue, I still felt myself desperately wanting to crawl into bed.

“Clo-chan, give me the most potent MP potion you have in Storage,” Efil said quickly.

Obediently, Clotho retrieved a particularly valuable and effective recovery item, which Efil promptly made me drink.

I gulped it down and let out a heavy sigh. “Aah, I’ve made it back to the land of the living. But I really can’t drink another drop...”

“That sure scared me, Kelvin-san. So, that’s what happens when someone runs low on MP?”

Melfina placed a hand on Rion’s shoulder. “That’s right. And that

is why you should always be careful about your MP usage. Honey even went so far as to make an example out of himself, so don't you ever forget this lesson."

"Is that what he was doing?!" the young girl exclaimed, whirling back towards me.

"Ah...yeah. As expected of Melfina, she sees right through me." *It's obviously not true, but I can't help trying to look cool. Sorry, I'm a guy.*

"So *that's* what it was, eh, my king?" Gerard laughed. "I think you'll make a fine teacher!"

"Mommy, Big Broth— Master really is amazing, isn't he?!"

"He sure is. But it's late now, so let's not shout, all right?" Ellie admonished her gently.

Thank you for pulling me out of the fire there, Melfina. "Anyway, as Ellie mentioned, it's getting quite late. Let's all hit the sack. Ruka, please take Rion to the guest room that's been set up. Rion, you'll have a chance to choose your own room tomorrow."

"Sure thing! Big Sister Rion, please follow me!"

"Thank you, Ruka. Oh, wait, hold on a moment. Kelvin-san." As she turned to leave the room, Rion abruptly looked back at me. "What is my official position in this party going to be?"

"Err, what? I mean, you're our newest companion, so...your position is as...a companion, I guess? What do you mean?"

"Wouldn't it be weird for a Level 1 like me to suddenly join your party and start living in your house?"

"Ohhh, fair point. I guess it could come across as a little suspicious." *It could even lead to uncomfortable rumors. And there's no telling what Guildmaster Rio might say.*

"How about going with the story that you two are half-siblings with different mothers?" offered Melfina. "Rion's traveled a long way from a distant country to follow in her brother's footsteps. After all, you share the same black hair that's quite rare in these parts."

Gerard stroked the chin of his helmet. "Well, their faces aren't all that similar...but I guess it could work."

"It's true that there were quite a few people with black hair in Toraj, but not so much in Parth." I turned to Rion. "Are you okay with that?"

"Sure, I don't mind! I used to be an only child, so I'm glad to have a brother," she replied with a bashful smile.

Am I just imagining it, or is her face a bit red? "Well, this time it's good night for real. Rion, things are going to get busy starting tomorrow. Make sure you get plenty of rest."

"Okay. Good night to you too. I'll do my best, Kel-nii!"

Chapter 2: Power-Leveling

The day after Rion was Summoned, our party visited Sangria Forest, a dungeon in Parth's vicinity that housed relatively high-level monsters. The aim was to power-level our new arrival by taking advantage of my Experience Sharing skill. The party member who delivered the final blow would normally get the bulk of the XP, but this skill allowed everyone in my group to receive an equal amount of points, no matter who did what. As a result, even a Level 1 adventurer would benefit from the same influx of XP, as if they had personally killed the monster.

"This really does feel like a dungeon!"

"Um, Master...why have we accompanied you?"

"Mommy, the forest is all dark! Why is it so dark even though it's daytime?"

I had brought Ellie and Ruka along as well. Although the two of them were not meant to be combat personnel, this was a world where danger lurked around every corner. I wanted them to at least be able to protect themselves if the need ever arose.

Their current Statuses were as follows.

Ellie (28 y/o, Female, Human, Maid)

Level: 5

Title: None

HP: 13/13

MP: 18/18

Strength: 5

Endurance: 5

Agility: 11

Magic: 4

Luck: 12

Skills: Service (Rank F), Cooking (Rank D), Cleaning (Rank E)

Ruka (10 y/o, Female, Human, Apprentice Maid)

Level: 1

Title: None

HP: 7/7

MP: 5/5

Strength: 2

Endurance: 1

Agility: 2

Magic: 1

Luck: 2

Skills: Service (Rank F), Sewing (Rank F)

For extra security, I had created a number of golems — the same ones that had made brief appearances during my fight against the Heroes — using Green Magic, and then assigned them to guard duty. Setsuna had cut them down like they were nothing, but she was a special case. Under normal circumstances, these golems had the strength of Rank A monsters.

I had assigned two improved prototypes to watch the front gate, four were stationed in various locations around the garden, and six more were distributed throughout the mansion itself. After creating them, I simply had to give them routine maintenance — during which I liked to modify them as well — and top up their magical batteries every once in a while. Talk about convenience. It was a bit of a secret, but tinkering with the golems had turned into a hobby of mine lately.

However, while having security was good and all, the Statuses of my new maids gave me little confidence in their ability to handle themselves if things ever went sideways.

“We need to raise your level, and Ruka’s too.”

“But Master, I have never fought any monsters before,” Ellie replied with a worried look.

“And I’ve only helped out a little with a hunt before!” added Ruka.

“Don’t worry, don’t worry. All you have to do today is hang out here. Before anything else, we need to give you three the necessary levels and skill points as a foundation to work from.”

Obviously, I had no intention of having Rion, Ellie, or Ruka actually fight in a place like this. It was going to be Gerard, Sera, and Clotho’s job to go into the dungeon and harvest the XP while these three remained on standby at the entrance and simply received their share of the points.

Sangria Forest was a Rank B dungeon, which meant that we wouldn’t be bothering anyone, as there were no other adventurers from Parth strong enough to brave the dangers. Efil, Melfina, and I were also staying behind to serve as guards.

“Kel-nii, I’m on standby too?”

“I’m sorry, but today, yeah.”

“I see. Well, I guess rushing in isn’t going to help anything. Maybe we can just talk instead!”

“Yes, let’s talk, let’s talk!!” cried Ruka with sparkling eyes.

“Settle down, you two. That’s what I planned on doing from the start.” *After all, just standing around waiting is a waste of time. Might as*

well use this opportunity to teach them some things about being an adventurer.

“Well then, we’ll be off, my king.”

“Gerard, want to have a little competition and see how many monsters we can each defeat in an hour?”

“Interesting. Is this meant to be a sort of rematch from yesterday?”

“Yes! It’s decided, then. Ready — start!”

“What the —?! That’s cheating!”

“Loser has to carry everyone’s luggage on the way homeeee!”

Sera’s voice faded into the distance as she took off into the sky. Despite being a beat late, Gerard wasted no time and quickly barreled into the depths of the forest after her.

Sera thinks she’s suggested a contest in which she would have the advantage thanks to her mobility, but has she forgotten about Clotho? When it comes to Rank B monsters, even Clotho’s clones would be strong enough to hold their own in a fight. In other words, it’s Team Slime against the other two.

Clotho’s main body was sitting nonchalantly on Efil’s shoulder as usual, but I could sense numerous clones already spreading out through the forest and initiating battles. *We usually just have Clotho carry everything in Storage anyway, so I’m not sure the bet is worth much, but whatever gets them fired up, I guess.*

“All right, how about we get started as well?”

I took out a notebook that would serve as a makeshift textbook, and Ruka made a doleful face. *Muahaha, who said we would just be chit-chatting? I’m going to talk, all right...as a part of your studies.*



Roughly thirty minutes after Sera and the rest had set out, Efil was keeping a lookout from up in a nearby tree, Melfina was smiling as she listened to me talk, and I was deep into my lesson.

“There are a total of five skills that deal with magic. Red Magic involves fire and lightning, and boasts the highest attack power. Blue magic uses water and ice, and is more focused on supporting your allies and interfering with opponents. Then there’s Green Magic, which focuses on wind and earth and, thanks to being quite well-balanced, provides the most flexibility in dealing with any situation. White Magic is incredibly powerful when it comes to destroying the undead and healing. And last but not least is Black Magic, which can control the dead and contains many crafty or sneaky spells. Of course, White Magic has attack spells too, and Red Magic also has buff spells. Take what I’m saying as a general impression and be aware that there will always be exceptions.”

“Kel-nii, the sound of fanfare that’s been going off inside my head non-stop is making it really hard for me to concentrate.”

“It means that you’ve been gaining a lot of levels. You three, want to take a peek at your own Statuses to see?”

“Um, ‘Status’...whoa! I’ve already leveled up that much?!” Rion cried with delight.

Ellie’s eyes widened in surprise as she quietly murmured, “Oh my...”

Ruka, whose head had practically been giving off steam just now from the misery of our study session, suddenly seemed to come back to life as she excitedly tried to show me her screen, going, “Me too! Master, look at it, look at it!”

Seems like things are going well on the hunting party’s side. Just as I was about to pat Ruka’s head, a telepathic message came in from Efil.

::Master, there is a shadow wolf heading in our direction. It is alone and might have strayed from the pack::

A stray monster? An idea suddenly came to me. This might be a good opportunity to show off my Summoning skill. We could do with a guard dog at the mansion, too.

Don’t shoot it. Let it through, I instructed through the Network, closing my textbook with a soft *thump*.

“Something the matter, Kel-nii?”

“It seems like a monster is coming out of the forest and heading in our direction. Rion, do you like dogs?”

“Dogs? Um, I guess? I never really had a chance to be around one in my previous life.”

“In that case, have a seat and wait for a few.”

Three faces looked back at me in puzzlement.

It wasn’t long before the figure of a shadow wolf emerged at the edge of the clearing. With its inky black fur, red eyes, and muscles twice the size of wolves in Japan, there was no mistaking it. *Ahh, this sure brings me back. How many of these did we face when Efil first joined the party?*

“M-Master! It’s dangerous!” Ellie shouted in alarm. She knew how strong I was, but this was her first time facing a Rank B monster, which residents of this world considered extremely dangerous. I was grateful for her concern, unneeded though it was.

“Not a problem. Mel, can you take up a position in front, just in case?”

“Sure thing.”

The shadow wolf directed its eyes my way. It would make things easier if it were to head straight for me, although the end result would be the same regardless.

After a brief face-off, the wolf let out a loud snarl and began

charging towards me.

“Air Pressure.”

I activated my go-to spell for immobilizing opponents, carefully keeping an eye on the creature’s remaining HP with Analyze Eye. Once the bar dropped below 50%, I let the spell dissipate and established a Contract with the beast. Half of my MP disappeared in an instant, and I was assaulted by a mild sense of fatigue.

“All right, it glowed. That’s a success, then.”

“Kel-nii, what was that?”

“What you just saw was the Contracting part of my Summoning skill. The wolf has now become one of my Followers. It’s been absorbed into my magic pool and is currently waiting there.”

Ellie blinked a few times. “So, that was Summoning? It’s my first time seeing it used in person.”

“Master is so strong!” gushed Ruka.

Oh, right, this shadow wolf wasn’t a Named Monster. Let’s have Rion give it a name once we get back to the house.

::Master, there’s an adventurer party approaching from behind.::

Other adventurers? This place sure is busy today. I don’t think I’ve ever seen any adventurers here besides us. Do you recognize them, Efil?

::They...appear to be Uld-san and his party.::



“Here we were, wondering who was in front of us, and turns out to be you, Kelvin! Uh, what are you doing with a cloth spread out in the middle of the entrance to the forest?”

As Efil had reported, the party approaching us had been Uld and his friends. *And here I was thinking no one would be here to bother us.*

Efil had descended from the tree and was now standing beside me.

I laughed awkwardly. “We, uh, thought we might have a picnic. It’s great weather and all.”

“A picnic in such a dangerous place?” Uld asked with an astonished expression.

Well, it’s technically true, so what can I say? “What about you, Uld-san? You don’t usually come to Sangria Forest, do you?”

“Our party finally fulfilled the requirements for taking the Rank B promotion exam. We’re here to carry it out.”

For their exam, they were to kill ten blood mushrooms, ten elder treants, and ten skull honeybees. Only after bringing back the relevant parts of the monsters as proof of the subjugations would they officially be promoted to Rank B.

Now that the dungeon boss wasn’t around, the creatures in the forest were relatively docile. Considering the strength of Uld’s party, they should be able to pull it off if they stayed focused and alert.

However, this was an exam that *all* of them needed to undergo. In other words, the subjugation requirements listed were *per person*. With them being a party of four, it was going to take quite a bit of time to reach the numbers they needed.

This was one way in which normal quests differed from promotion exams. While the former tested the strength of the party as a whole, the latter tested the strength of each individual. Of course, since we happened to be here anyway, we could certainly lend them a bit of help as well, at least with anything outside of direct combat.

The fighting, of course, they would have to do themselves, as it was impossible to falsify exactly who had subjugated which monster, even for those within the same party. This was because anyone with Analyze Eye at a high enough rank could actually check the identity of the person who had delivered the final blow. Naturally, this was something that the Adventurer's Guild would look over very thoroughly. Lying about it and having that lie be exposed would be a huge problem.

"By the way, I see some new faces. Efil I know, of course, but who is this pretty lady and the cute little girl beside her?!"

"Oh, um, yeah. Ellie and Ruka are newly hired maids who will be working at our house, so they're not *really* in my party."

Ellie lowered her head slightly in greeting, and Ruka copied her.

"Dammit, I'm envious!"

"And here we are, a party of only guys..."

"You mean to say that Efil-chan and Sera-san aren't enough for you?!"

The three adventurers standing behind Uld-san glared at me with a measure of resentment. Although not quite on Efil and Sera's level, Ellie was certainly beautiful. And Ruka had inherited a lot of her genes.

I was not familiar with Uld's companions, but Analyze Eye told me that, including Uld himself, it was a well-balanced party with a warrior, a swordsman, an archer, and a mage, all in their thirties. All of the men were extremely macho, for some reason, which gave the party an overly testosterone-charged atmo— no, a very gallant, manly atmosphere.

"Calm down, you guys! Don't get flustered over something so petty!"

"Sorry, Uld-san. I don't know what came over me."

Uld — who actually seemed quite flustered himself — had appealed to his friends, thankfully with some measure of success. *That's Parth's most veteran adventurer for you. Let's take this opportunity to get the greetings out of the way.*

"Oh, right, I haven't introduced these two yet. This is Mel, and

over here is Rion.”

“It is my pleasure to make your acquaintance. My name is Mel,” said Melfina, radiating a sort of holy-looking backlit glow.

Rion, in contrast, offered her greeting with a touch of nerves, possibly from a lack of experience in speaking with adults. “M-My name is Rion. I, um, am Kel-nii’s little sister. Nice to meet you.”

“ULD-SAN! Life is *shit*, you know that?!”

“He’s got a cute little sister now too?!”

“*And* some kind of saint-like girl!”

“Hold on, you guys. I understand how you feel, but hold on!”

“As if someone with a wife and kids could possibly understand the feelings of us bachelors!”

“Hear, hear!”

“That’s right!”

For some reason, the voices of protest from his party grew even more heated. *Now I’m worried about whether he can hold them back.*

How did things start spiraling so fast?

Luckily, Melfina’s halo and white wings were currently nowhere to be seen. Or rather, those parts of her artificial body were merely magical constructs, which meant that she could materialize and dematerialize them at will. Thankfully, she’d had the presence of mind to make herself less conspicuous. Otherwise, we would have had a *lot* of explaining to do.

::Master, I don’t think Uld-san is going to last much longer::

You’re right. Guess I should provide my supp—

“We just got back, Kelvin! Uh, what’s going on here?”

“What is this chaotic situation, my king?”

It seemed an hour had passed since the start of their contest, and Sera and Gerard had returned from their hunt. Clotho’s clones could also be seen hopping along behind them.

“Hold on, is this not Uld-dono that I see?”

“And that voice is...Gerard-dono! What perfect timing. Please help me to calm these idiots down!”

Oh, right, Gerard and Uld struck up a friendship at the celebratory dinner after we defeated Viktor. With Gerard as reinforcement, it looks like Uld has been spared from a cruel and unusual death at the hands of his companions.

Sera tilted her head in puzzlement. “Sooo...who is that guy? An acquaintance of Gerard’s?”

“You don’t remember him?”

“I haven’t a clue!”

“Well, I suppose you *did* get pretty smashed during that party. Even though you only had a single cup that time...” I sighed. “You really shouldn’t ever drink again, okay?” *Looking after you was an*

incredible challenge, both physically and mentally. Good thing it's now just a fond...well, it's a memory, at least.

Soon enough, Gerard finished suppressing the macho group's outrage. I returned my attention to the conversation just in time to hear him say, "Look, you guys, I might not know what the situation is, but you're clearly putting Uld-dono in a tough spot. Calm down and rethink the matter with cooler heads."

Uld bowed slightly. "Gerard-dono, I'm sorry for having pulled you into this. I should have done a better job keeping my men in check. Thank you for the help."

"Ah, it's give and take, as they say. I'm indebted to you for having once saved my king's life."

"Oh, come on, that was nothing."

By "debt," Gerard was referring to the time that Uld had rescued me from Sera's neck choke. *Oh, no, no, no, that incident was hardly "nothing." I can safely say that was the closest I've been to dying since coming to this world. If he hadn't spoken up, I probably wouldn't be here today.*

"And you guys! Have you forgotten that we are about to take on the challenge of Sangria Forest, a Rank B dungeon?! Do you think you'll be able to pass your exams if you let yourselves get distracted so easily?!"

Sera looked over. "Exam? What exam?"

"We are in the middle of our Rank B promotion exam," Uld replied. "We must each subjugate a certain number of monsters within this dungeon."

"Ah..."

"Ah..."

Hold on, why did Sera and Gerard both harmonize on that worry-inducing "Ah"...?

"That's gonna be a problem, isn't it?" murmured Gerard.

"It is a problem indeed," Sera replied.

I looked at the two of them suspiciously. "What did you guys do?" *And why do I have this sudden sense of foreboding?*

"Master," Efil interjected, "I don't see any monsters within the forest. I think maybe..."

Hold on, my Presence Sensing isn't picking up anything either. If Efil can't make out any monsters with her Farsight, it can only mean...

Sera laughed awkwardly. "Um, yeah, we've completely cleared out the entire dungeon."



"I'm so sorry, Uld-san! It seems my friends got a bit carried away!" I cried, prostrating myself and grinding my forehead into the

ground in apology.

“Please raise your head, Kelvin. If this dungeon really has been emptied of monsters, that’s a good thing for Parth. Clare and every other citizen will be able to sleep even safer tonight!”

Apparently, Gerard, Sera, and Clotho had returned to us not because the one-hour mark had passed, but because they had already annihilated the entire monster population of Sangria Forest. Sera had confirmed this fact with her detection skills while they were still inside, so there was little room for doubt. The three of them had reconvened, and after agreeing that the competition was a wash, they came back out for lack of anything better to do.

Although unintentional, we had still ended up hindering Uld and his party’s promotion exam.

“Once I explain things to Rio, I’m sure he’ll understand. Our exam just got a rain check, is all. And it seems like my guys need some time to get their heads back in the game, too, so I should be thanking you instead!”

“Uld-san...” What a big heart he has! Both he and his wife are just the nicest people ever.

“In any case, your party is incredibly strong. I know that’s not new, but I feel like this has really put it into perspective for me,” the older adventurer laughed as he ran a hand through his beard. “I suppose it really is about time for you guys to have your Rank S exam.”

“I’m sorry, what?”

“You’re having your Rank S promotion soon, right? Rio said so.”

What the hell? It’s my exam, and I’m the only one who hasn’t heard about it yet?

“Aha! He’s probably keeping it a secret from you while he makes the preparations, so that he can spring it on you without warning.”

“Well, that would be obnoxious. That damn raccoon dog...” *I can easily imagine him doing something like that.*

“I haven’t actually heard the details of the exam, but it’s probably not going to be easy, being a Rank S promotion and all.”

I laughed weakly. “Probably not.”

“Then again, it didn’t seem like he was in any particular hurry. You should use the time to make your preparations.”

Fair enough. We’ll do what we can, I suppose. Oh, and since I’ve bumped into Uld, I might as well tell him about our new home.

After chatting for a while longer, we all headed back to Parth together. By “all,” I mean both Uld’s party and my own, as it was now impossible for them to carry out their subjugations.

I should probably also put in a word with Rio to ask for a new assignment for their exam.



“Still, a new promotion exam...” I muttered. “With all the promotions I’ve received as ‘a special case,’ it feels like it’s been a while since I’ve actually taken a test.”

Scrub, scrub, scrub.

“Are you feeling nervous, Kel-nii? No matter what the content of the exam is, I can’t imagine you struggling with it.”

Scrub, scrub, scrub.

“Arf!”

Scrub, scrub, scrub.

“Come on, Alex!” Rion scolded. “Stop struggling! We’re trying to wash you!”

Scrub, scrub, scrub.

“I’m rinsing him off now,” I warned.

Pshaah.

“Master, here is a towel.”

“Thanks, Efil. Alex, we’re going to towel you off n—”

Shake, shake, shake!

“AAGH! Stop shaking yourself dry, I *said* we’ll dry you off with a towel!”

“Ahaha, you’re all drenched, Kel-nii!”

It was just after lunch, the time of the day when everyone gets a little sleepy, and I was in the garden of my estate with Rion and Efil. The three of us were washing Alex (named by Rion), the shadow wolf I had Contracted with in Sangria Forest the day before. Having lived in the wild up until now, he hadn’t exactly smelled like a bouquet of roses.

“Gah, looks like I’ll need a shower myself after this.”

Wipe, wipe.

“All right, that should do it. Ready, Efil?”

“Any time, Master.”

Efil used Red Magic to warm up the air, while I used Green Magic to give it direction. And voilà, our brand-new cooperative spell, Dryer! The must-have Life Magic spell had been developed through a *lot* of trial and error on our part. *Thank you once again for your Parallel Processing, Miyabi!*

This collaborative routine of ours was something we had started tinkering with as an aside to our nighttime...ahem, *efforts* at deepening our relationship. Afterwards, we would mess around with our magic a bit for fun, and this spell was essentially a byproduct of that.

“It really does work like a dryer,” Rion marveled.

“The sad thing is, Efil and I can’t use it on ourselves,” I replied with a wry smile. After all, the spell required very intense

concentration. Our most frequent customer was Sera, but because it was quite a tiring process, we only did it for her once in a while. On this occasion, it was meant as a welcome bonus for our newest member.

“Look at how fluffy your fur’s become, Alex!” Rion crooned as she stroked the shadow wolf’s black coat. Belying the creature’s appearance, its fur was actually quite soft. Almost addictively so, in fact.

“And lastly, we just have to get this collar on and...all done!”

The collar with Alex’s name on it — which I had handcrafted myself — fit comfortably around his neck. *Yeah, okay, now he just looks like a big dog.*

Efil narrowed her eyes in appreciation. “What wonderful craftsmanship. Now no one would mistake Alex for a wild monster.”

“That’s right. And he’s been prettied up as well.”

“Kel-nii, Efil-nee, I’ll go take Alex for a walk now.”

Uh, does a wolf need walks? Well, why not. “Just make sure to be back by dinnertime.”

“Rion-sama, I wish you an enjoyable outing.”

Efil and I watched as Rion and Alex ran out through the front gate. My “little sister” was so polite that she even waved to the golems on guard duty. Then again, our golems were so high-specced that they waved back in response, so I suppose it wasn’t that strange.

There was no knowing if Rion’s Companionship skill had anything to do with it, but she and Alex had immediately bonded. Their levels were similar too, so it was my hope that they would motivate and support each other going forward.

“How are Ellie and Ruka progressing?”

“Thanks to yesterday’s excursion, both of them have undergone remarkable growth. In regards to their skills, I let them choose whatever they wanted, just as you instructed.”

“Good, thanks.”

As with Efil, I did not want to impose in any way. I strongly believed that choosing one’s skills was a right that belonged solely to each person.

“If there’s nothing else, I will go prepare the bath. It will take a while. What do you plan on doing in the meantime, Master?”

“Melfina and Sera are having a practice match in the training room now, aren’t they? I’ll go watch them. After all, I still need more data on Melfina’s fighting style.”

It hadn’t been long since I’d Summoned Melfina to join us. Although I knew the technical details from her Status, it was no substitute for actually watching her in a fight. I needed to carefully observe her in order to get a better idea of how to best include her in

our teamwork during battles. For now, my focus was on understanding her strengths and methods. *Then* the trial and error could begin.

“Very well. I will come down to the training room to fetch you when the bath is ready.”

“Sounds good.” A mischievous idea flashed through my mind, and I gave voice to it. “Since it’s been a while, would you like to go in together?”

Efil’s pointed ears perked up, and her face grew redder and redder with each passing moment. “Ah, um...the sun is still up, so I’m only going to wash your back!”

Despite being calm and composed most of the time, she was still quite shy regarding such matters. *Efil-san, your ears are betraying your thoughts.*





“They sure are going at it,” I noted as I entered the room.

In the middle of our now-familiar training hall stood Melfina, surrounded by numerous flowers made of ice. It was a whole field of artificial flowers, which she had created with her Blue Magic, each one of them proudly blooming works of art.

Ah, a spell cast on the environment itself. As for Sera...

My demon companion, in contrast, was running towards the goddess’s location by smashing her way through the flowers with fists wreathed in an aura of Black Magic. With every flower she touched, her HP — which I was monitoring with Analyze Eye — dropped slightly.

So, it’s a kind of magic that deals damage with contact. I could have acquired detailed information on the artificial flowers if I’d used Analyze Eye, but I had decided to adopt a spectator’s point of view for the time being. *Let’s ask Melfina about it later.*

“Brrr...I can feel the cold even from this far away.”

“That’s ‘cause you’re wearing so little, Master!”

“Oh, hey there, Ruka.”

The kid was wearing a coat over her maid uniform. Covering her head was a hood with cute animal ears the same shade of chestnut brown as her own hair. *I bet either Efil or Ellie made it for her.*

“This spot is free!” Ruka offered, patting the ground next to where she was sitting.

“Guess I’ll take you up on that. You’re all done with your work?”

“Yep, it’s my break time! Grandpa Gerard was here a minute ago, but then he went off somewhere.”

“Leaving you all alone? That doesn’t sound like him.” *Given how much he dotes on her, I can’t imagine him leaving her side of his own accord.*

“Rukaaaa! Grandpa has brought you snacks! I hope you li— Why are you in my seat, my king?”

“Er...don’t mind me.” *Yeah, okay, that’s the Gerard I know. He’s even starting to act like this with Rion now, too.*

“Did you also come to watch Princess and Sera’s match, my king? It’s quite the spectacle, isn’t it?”

“Mm, I’m quite interested in seeing how this plays out. Both of them use a good balance of close-quarters combat and magic, but while Sera likes to go on the offensive, it looks like Melfina prefers to focus on recovery and buffs. It’s a pretty interesting match-up.”

I continued exchanging predictions with Gerard while Ruka and I stuffed our faces with cookies. *Their equipment and skill loadout are*

generally evenly matched, but I suppose Sera's stats leave her at a bit of a disadvantage. Sure, her strength is off the charts, but Melfina is even further ahead thanks to Sympathetic Resonance.

"Looks like things are about to get interesting," I noted.

Gerard nodded in agreement. "I think so too."



Once Sera finally managed to smash her way through the flowers, she headed straight for Melfina. Both of her hands were bleeding profusely, and it was clear that she had already suffered a lot of HP damage. There was an abundance of blood staining the flower fragments that were scattered in a trail behind her.

In contrast, Melfina had yet to lose a single point of health. With a composed smile, she said, "The power to smash through Frozen Vajra Briar is impressive indeed, but your fighting style is far too straightforward, Sera."

"Giving your opponent advice? Somebody's taking it easy."

"And somebody's yet to land a single hit on me, so...pretty much."

"Fair enough. But you do realize that you are now within my reach, right?" Sera replied just before disappearing.

Wait, no, she just leaped up into the air so fast that it seemed like she disappeared.

Melfina's eyes, however, could clearly keep up with Sera's movements just fine. "Sub-zero Rampart!"

Without losing her smile, the goddess calmly cast her next spell, making a wall of ice materialize between her opponent and herself. This Blue Magic counterpart to my Adamantite Rampart stretched as high as the training room's ceiling.

"I'm sure you could destroy this with three or four serious punches. But the few seconds it will take you to do so are going to cost you the match," Melfina commented, bracing her spear.

If Sera was to charge straight in from the front, she would end up impaling herself. Yet even faced with such an obstacle, the demon's eyes continued to blaze with self-confidence. Melfina quickly picked up on this and grew suspicious, but it was a moment too late.

"Jin Scrimmage, right arm only!"

Magic the color of night and Sera's red blood mixed together instantaneously and sank into her right arm.

"Isn't that Viktor's move?!" cried Gerard.

I whistled in admiration. "So, she knows how to use it. What's more, her activation speed is much faster than Viktor's."

Gerard's astonishment was understandable, as he was the one who'd had the most practice matches with Sera so far, and she had never used that move during any of them. Surprise also filled

Melfina's face for the first time. No one besides Sera herself knew whether this was something she had learned only recently or if she had been hiding it all along, but one thing was clear: her proficiency with the spell was even greater than Viktor's had been.

Sera chortled. "Since you mentioned it, let's see how many of my 'serious punches' this can really take!"

The giant arm made of pitch-black magic had razor-sharp claws for fingers and looked ominous and incredibly tough. A grotesque monstrosity — the appearance of which practically screamed 'Danger!' — it rushed through the air and slammed into the wall of ice.



The Rank A Blue Magic spell Sub-zero Rampart was so tough that even Rank A monsters wouldn't be able to leave a scratch on it. In addition, it was enchanted with the same HP-draining abilities of Frozen Vajra Briar, which meant that anyone trying to break through with half-assed attacks would only be hurting themselves in the process. For Melfina, whose basic battle strategy centered around defense, this was an all-purpose spell useful for both damaging her enemies and protecting herself.

It crumbled to pieces with a single attack from the demon.

Crash!

Sera's arm, which had been transformed by Jin Scrimmage, slammed into the wall, causing deep cracks to spider through it almost instantly. The point of contact caved in, then the rest of the barrier collapsed, with ice fragments flying in Melfina's direction.

As she parried the hail storm with her spear, Melfina analyzed what had just taken place. *She didn't receive any noticeable damage from making contact with the wall. From this, I gather that black arm of hers not only increases her damage output, but serves as a form of armor as well. In this case, should I focus on destroying the arm, or should I target the unaffected parts of her body? Under normal circumstances, the latter seems the obvious choice, but...*

"Destroying that aberration seems like a nice challenge!"

"You're more passionate than I gave you credit for! I like that!"

Sera rotated in midair, then used the momentum from the spin to brandish her right arm in a sweeping attack. Her claws were spread wide, rushing towards Melfina as if to tear her into pieces with their deadly sharpness.

"Divine Aspect!"

Pure white wings sprang into being on Melfina's back, emitting a brilliant holy aura that flowed through her armor and into her spear.

During their practice matches, Kelvin's friends would use weapons that were easily broken and made to be as non-lethal as possible.

Consequently, Sera and Melfina were not using their main Rank S weapons. It was a measure adopted partly for safety reasons and partly to avoid unconsciously growing overly reliant on exceptional gear.

Naturally, it stood to reason that these flimsy practice weapons wouldn't be able to withstand techniques and magic beyond a certain level. In fact, the knuckle dusters that Sera had put on at the start of the match were now completely destroyed thanks to her activation of Jin Scrimmage (although in this case, her arm had also grown too big for them to fit anyway). Gerard, of course, couldn't actually change his equipment, so he would be debuffed before matches instead, so as to remain more or less on his partner's level.

This particular fight was no exception. Before long, Melfina's glowing spear was giving off worrying sounds of snaps and creaks, but she paid it no mind. The shining weapon was thrust forward to meet Sera's approaching arm.

"Hah!"

"Hmph!"

Black and white collided, creating a shockwave that reached even Kelvin's position. A moment later, the two colors blended together as Melfina's spear dug into the palm of Sera's mutated appendage. But it was Sera who burst into a grin.

"This spear is now mine!"

Having already been on the verge of falling apart, the blade had not done much damage to her despite having pierced her artificial hand. She clenched her fist and, after a brief struggle, successfully managed to crush the offending spear into pieces.

With that, Melfina had lost her only weapon and was quickly reduced to a defenseless state. The goddess tried to back up several steps to regain her balance, but Sera accelerated forward with the Flight skill to close the distance and deliver a final blow. The unexpected upset convinced Kelvin that the latter now had the match in the bag.

"I really am surprised. You have grown a lot!" said Melfina as a smile returned to her face.

PANG!

"What the —"

With a loud sound that brought to mind the smashing of porcelain, Sera's Jin Scrimmage crumbled away. She had no idea what had just happened. Naturally, neither did those who were spectating from the sidelines.

"Divine Aspect is not a buff. It is a spell that envelopes my body with a holy aura that purifies everything abnormal. It affects not only debuffs, but also buffs and transformations. And its target is not only

myself.”

Clang!

What was left of Melfina's spear had, along with the disappearance of Sera's Jin Scrimmage, fallen to the ground. It flickered a few last times before going out entirely.

“Wait, you let me grab your spear on purpose?!”

“Even though you were in direct contact with the spell, it took some time for it to dispel your magic. If that arm of yours had lasted just a few seconds longer, it would have been my loss, Sera.”

Thanks to the demon's acceleration, the two were now in close proximity — close enough to each unleash an attack. Since they had both lost their buffs, it was going to be their basic abilities that would determine the outcome of the fight.

Melfina's magic glowed a bluish-white, then was unleashed tow—

“It's not over YET!”

Something invisible slammed into the floor, after which Sera's direction changed abruptly. The magical attack Melfina had unleashed merely grazed her cheek and disappeared into the distance, leaving a frozen trail along the ground.

That was her tail! The one that's currently invisible! Melfina realized in surprise.

As a demon, Sera had horns, wings, and a tail. However, these physical characteristics were currently hidden by the Clip of Camouflage that she wore. Having used up all its power to cancel Jin Scrimmage, the Divine Aspect effect had failed to offset the effect of the clip.

By stabbing her invisible tail into the ground, Sera had managed to evade the otherwise unavoidable attack. She had also succeeded in distracting her opponent for the briefest of moments.

Ignoring the crackling ice on her skin, the demon poured all of her strength into her next and final assault. All of the blood spread across the ground from the start of the fight was suddenly charged with magic. Where it had been in contact with parts of the Frozen Vajra Briar — and this was more than half of the scattered blood — it instantly sucked the magic out of the shards of ice and sent it all straight to Sera's fist.

“Crucifixion!”

The trajectory of the demon's fists painted an inverted cross the color of fresh blood. It was an attack that would grow more powerful the more magic that was absorbed and the more Sera bled.

A crimson flash slammed squarely into Melfina's abdomen and stained her blue armor red.

“Oof!” she cried as the air left her lungs.

The goddess who had descended to the mortal plane had been

brought to her knees by a demon.



“It was a great fight, you two. Are you still hurting anywhere?”

“Kelvin, calm down. You covered everything already when you healed us just now.”

“I’m fine, too. Thank you, honey.”

In the end, the fight was treated as a draw. The moment Melfina had crumpled to her knees, Sera had also expended the last drop of her strength. With both of them unable to continue, there was nothing for it but to call it a wash.

“Sera, you did great just now. If I didn’t have the advantage in stats, I would have lost for sure.”

“Nah, come on. You still haven’t gotten used to that body of yours yet either, right? And if you had gone full throttle from the start, I wouldn’t have been able to cut it that close.”

Aren’t friendships developed through crossing fists just beautiful? Plus, I’m glad to see both of them staying humble and objectively analyzing their own shortcomings. I really have found myself great companions.

“So...you two went at it pretty hard just now. Was there any particular reason?”

“Mel, you want to tell him?”

“Oh, that. Honey, we were betting for the right to sleep next to you tonight.”

“I’m sorry, what?” *This is my first time hearing about it..*

Sera puffed out her cheeks a little. “Efil is always sleeping on your right side, after all. If that spot is reserved for her, then it only leaves your left side open!”

“After realizing that several hours ago, the two of us came up with a bet to decide who would claim that position. Unfortunately, the match was a draw.”

“Uh...”

“Mel, what do you want to bet on next?”

“Hmm...how about whether dinner tonight will be, as Honey refers to it, ‘Japanese-style’ or ‘Western-style’?”

I think I’m getting a headache. First of all, Efil and I aren’t just sleeping next to each oth— cough, cough, cough.

“Grandpa! I can’t hear anything if you cover my ears!”

“You’re still too young, Ruka.”



Quite out of character, I found myself waking up in the middle of the night. Before my brain had fully turned on, I registered a familiar

smell that put me at ease and a soft warmth against my skin.

“Zzz...zzz...”

Efil was asleep on my chest. Normally, I would be sound asleep until she woke me up, so this was a rare occurrence. It had been some time since I'd last seen her sleeping face. As always, it was an angelic sight.

After having had my fill of staring at her face and enjoying her warmth, I gently lowered her head to the bed and tried to slide away. However...

Squish.

There was something extremely soft touching my back. Then white arms suddenly snaked around my neck.

“Hehehe, I'm all full already...but I'll have seconds tooooo...”

Although her manner of speaking was different at the moment, the owner of the voice was most definitely Melfina. She seemed to be talking in her sleep. *Hey there, goddess, you're drooling. DUDE! Don't wipe it on my pajamas!*

The question of why Melfina was in my bed immediately came to mind, but then I remembered the answer. After winning the “What cuisine is tonight's dinner going to be?” bet with Sera yesterday, she had crawled into my bed that night. *I mean, she's got a 900 Luck stat, so that figures, right?*

Efil had simply said, “If that's what you want, Master,” and readily accepted the arrangement. I was swept along for the ride, and that's how the current situation came to be. But to be clear, there was *no* funny business. Melfina was probably pressing her breasts against me because she thought I was a pillow or something. I repeat, *nothing happened.*

Although, admittedly, her bountiful breasts did feel quite heavenly.

After that infamous party where Sera had tried drinking for the first time, I developed a bit of an aversion to someone putting their arm around my neck from behind. However, the one doing it this time was Melfina, so there was nothing to fear.

I slowly and gently detached her and managed to free myself. It was not the easiest task as she had, in an obstinate attempt to glue herself to me, thrown her legs over me as I was attempting to slip away. *She sure is forward even in her sleep.*

I looked back at the bed with a sigh. “She moves around quite a bit in her sleep...”

“Ah, so this...is the legendary...sushi!”

“What kind of dreams *are* you having?!”

Oops, I said that out loud. You're good, Melfina, getting a retort out of me even while fast asleep. But still, to be thinking of food even in her

dreams...

It was a bit surprising, but Melfina had turned out to be the party member with the biggest appetite. On a good day, she could eat double Gerard's portion easily. I couldn't for the life of me figure out how all that food actually fit into her petite 160 cm frame.

"Zzz...nn..."

"Zzz...honey..."

I affectionately caressed both of their heads. Staring at them for a moment, I realized once again just how unbelievably beautiful they both were.

"Never would I have imagined being in such a situation in my previous life. I mean, I don't think I would have. Not that I remember."

Although I had retained general knowledge from my previous world, I couldn't remember a single thing about myself. Preferences and hobbies could be deduced based on the types of knowledge I possessed, but anything that might identify who I'd been as a person, including information about my family and friends, was a complete blank.

I wasn't particularly bothered by it, though. After all, it *was* my previous life. What I did remember of that world felt more like someone else's memories, if anything.

My place was here, in this world. Melfina, who had helped to arrange my transmigration, was here. Efil, who had supported me almost from the start, was here. And there were more and more companions filling up my life, one at a time. It was here, with all of them, where I planned to continue living.

"And if anyone wishes us harm, they need to be exterminated."

Looking out the window at the moonlit landscape, I finally directed my thoughts to the real reason I had woken up at this time of night.



When I reached the second floor and stepped out onto the balcony, I saw that a few others had arrived before me.

"You're late, Kelvin!"

Waiting there were Sera, Clotho, Rion, and at their feet, Alex.

"Good morning, Kel-nii! Or is it still 'good evening'?"

"Good...something, everyone. Sorry, I only just woke up."

"Hmph! Who knows what you were doing before this," muttered Sera as she averted her gaze.

Am I imagining it or is she in a bad mood? "What's the matter, Sera?"

"Nooooothing."

“You sure?” *Well, no matter. We’ve got bigger issues to worry about right now.* “All right, then, getting down to business. You guys being here means you felt it too, right?”

Sera’s face turned serious, and she nodded. “There are people moving around the estate. They number fourteen in total.”

Our property was currently being surrounded by a group of strangers. Normally, no one would be out and about this late at night, and even if there were people wandering the streets, they wouldn’t all be staring at our home.

I had woken up because Presence Sensing had picked up the unusual life signs. They were currently peering in from outside our walls, but it felt like they were going to make their move soon.

“Sera-nee is the one who told me and Alex. Embarrassingly, we didn’t notice anything at all.”

“Arf!”

Alex had been given a big cushion in Rion’s room, and that was where he slept. Both of them had likely been woken up by Sera at the same time.

“Efil and Melfina seemed pretty tired, so I let them continue sleeping.”

“I’m tired too!” grumbled Sera.

I could have woken up Efil at any time, if necessary, but Melfina was another matter. Specifically, she was so bad at waking up that no one could actually shake her awake. She claimed to be a “serious and responsible goddess,” but from my observations, she was actually a bit...um, slovenly, here and there, especially when she didn’t think anyone was looking.

“How about Gerard?”

“Already took up position in front of Ellie and Ruka’s room,” Sera confirmed.

“Good call. With him on guard, we won’t have to worry about them.” *Not that I have any intention of letting the intruders get that far, of course.*

Just in case, I commanded three of the golems within the house to fortify the area around the mother and daughter’s room. Then I turned from my companions to direct my gaze outside.

“So...from what I can see, they don’t look all that strong. Most of them are around Level 20. Oh, there’s a Level 26. He’s farthest in the back, so that’s probably their boss.”

“You can see that far, Kel-nii?”

“I borrowed Farsight from Efil,” I explained, raising my right Skill Eater gauntlet slightly.

From this distance, Farsight was more than enough to help me see all of our presumed intruders. The fact that they were all masked

certainly didn't help their case.

"Rion, Alex, you two think you can handle this?"

"What? Me?" Rion looked completely caught off guard.

Her reaction was understandable, as she hadn't had any significant experience with actual battle so far. What's more, our current opponents were other humans, not monsters. But I felt this was something she needed to get used to if she was to continue living here as an adventurer.

Fortunately, she had already earned a whole lot of skill points and had assigned them based on her own preferences. Among the skills she had picked up was Nerves of Steel, which would go a long way toward helping her steady her mind.

We also had the advantage as the battlefield was our own home. All things considered, the conditions were perfect for Rion's first experience in taking on other humans.

"That's right. I've cast Silent Whisper on our outer walls, so you can make as much noise as you like without having to worry about bothering the neighbors. I'll order the front gate golems to vacate their posts. I want you to take care of each intruder as they enter the grounds. The rest of us will keep a close eye out and provide support if the situation ever gets dicey. You think you can do it?"

Rion and Alex looked at each other. It lasted for only a moment, but the two of them seemed to have had an entire conversation within that time. Then Rion smiled and said with determination, "All right, I'll do it!" as Alex's red eyes sharpened in a sign of combat readiness.

"That's my sister! Clotho, please give her a clone."

The slime obediently created a tiny clone that would provide her with access to both the Follower Network and Storage, and directed it to leap onto her shoulder. With this, Rion was linked up to the rest of the party. *It should also help her to communicate with Alex even more effectively than before.*

I gave her a quick rundown on how to use her brand-new Clotho terminal.

::Test, test...um, can anyone hear me?::

Loud and clear. I'll add the information that I gathered from Presence Sensing and Farsight to the map. I hope it helps. Good luck!

::Wow, this is super convenient! Thank you, Kel-nii!::

Go forth, young Hero!



There was a man leaning against a wall in a dark alley in Parth. Between his common Parthian attire and the wine bottle in his hand, he looked every bit the part of a drunkard nursing his drink.

The man's eyes, however, were far too alert. What's more, they

were also fixed on a specific point: the entrance to Kelvin's estate. The man watched as the guards at the front gate shuffled inside.

There's a limit to how much information I can gather from all the way back here. It's too far to use Analyze Eye on those guards. But with them gone for the moment, it seems like the best time for our raid.

Coming to this conclusion, the man immediately sent instructions to his subordinates using hand signals: *Infiltrate the place while using Covert Action.*

While waiting for news, the captain was left alone with his thoughts. *The adventurer who's recently risen to prominence and is living within this estate colluded with the Heroes of Deramis in the arrest of Christoph-sama. It would have been the Heroes who ultimately bested our champion, but this upstart adventurer could become a threat to Trycen one day too. And being an accomplice in the heinous framing of Christoph-sama as a bandit chief is absolutely unforgivable! We will assault him in his bed, and, if possible, force him to give us information on the Heroes. This is what the Black Ops was gathered to do. We might not stand a chance in a frontal assault, but at this hour, we are vengeance personified!*

These men who had disguised themselves and were currently surveilling Kelvin's home were spies from the country of Trycen.

Crown Prince, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for granting us social outcasts this great opportunity!

Long ago, at the end of the great war that had ravaged the Eastern Continent, the remaining four countries had signed a ceasefire with each other. The militant country of Trycen had been one of those nations, despite being the most aggressive and violent member of the group, and the country with the greatest propensity for invading others.

As time passed, the Black Ops branch of Trycen's army, which had been greatly feared and respected during the war for their ability to assassinate key foreigners, gather information, and commit grand acts of sabotage, had been reduced to a shell of its former self. Its standing within the Trycenian forces had continued to fall over the years, and the scale of their operation was now nothing compared to what it had once been.

It was in the midst of such desperate circumstances that Prince Azgrad, the crown prince of Trycen and general of the Dragon Knight Order, had presented them with a special mission. This particular Black Ops captain had leapt at the chance, seeing it as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make the rest of the army recognize their importance once again.

We will succeed with this mission and show them all!

But Azgrad, the man who had given the order, had done so without knowing a rather important piece of information. And this

Black Ops captain and his men, despite now being on site, were none the wiser either. Not a single one of them had an inkling of the power of the absolutely inhuman individuals who dwelled within the estate that they were about to invade.



In front of the fountain that decorated the estate's garden stood a lone figure.

"They're here," Rion murmured, keeping an eye on the moving red dots as they moved around the map displayed inside her head.

Three from the front, four coming over the left wall, and another three from the right, she thought to herself. Seems like the remaining four are on standby. Hmm, looks like I can't take too much time dealing with each of them one by one. It would be a problem if any were to get away...

Rion tapped into the Follower Network to reach out to her canine partner.

::Alex, looks like our first battle is going to be a race against time. Let's finish this quickly and impress Kel-nii!::

::Arf!::

::Good answer!::

Looks like Alex is fired up. I'm also in my best possible condition. Everyone is watching over us from the house. We can do this.

She took several quick hops in place. Unlike in her previous life, the body she had transmigrated into felt extremely light. It was free of disease and, thanks to her having picked up the Acrobatics skill, capable of incredible stunts that she had only ever seen on TV before. Her past self would never have dreamed that any of it was possible.

This world really is a dream come true. Efil-nee is kind and makes the greatest food, and Kel-nii feels strangely familiar and puts me at ease. With Sera-nee and everybody else around all the time, every day is a blast.

The opponents tonight were not monsters, but humans, and Rion wasn't entirely comfortable with the idea of harming them. However, the weight of her uncertainties paled in comparison to the importance of her new family. Fortunately, the Nerves of Steel skill that she had picked up was contributing greatly to keeping her cool. And as for resolve...she had already made up her mind.

Since she hadn't learned any magic yet, this fight was going to be pure close-quarters combat. However, Rion did not think of that as a handicap. She drew the sword she had received from Kelvin, then directed her gaze forward.

::Alex, let's take care of the front first. Off we go::

Her feet touched the ground after several more hops, and she abruptly dashed forward. She would fight to protect this warm place that had become her new home.





“She’s doing much better than I expected,” I commented.

Sera nodded in agreement. “Her fundamental swordsmanship still needs quite a bit of work, but she’s taken quite well to the Rank S Sword Mastery. Once Gerard gives her some proper instruction, her growth is going to shoot through the roof. Her coordination with Alex is also quite impressive.”

The instant that Rion had taken off for the front gate, three intruders had vaulted over the walls and into the grounds. Though they weren’t very good at it, they were all using Covert Action, which did make their presences slightly harder to detect. However, it wasn’t much of a problem for Rion and Alex, who already knew their opponents’ locations thanks to the information I had shared with them beforehand.

One man was cut down before his feet even reached the ground, and another had his throat torn wide open. *No time to scream. Good, clean job.*

“Looks like she won’t have the opportunity to show off her Unique Skill tonight.” *Then again, we couldn’t lose to this trash if we wanted to. Even if they had managed to attack us in our sleep, we still would have won.*

“They went to the effort of coordinating a simultaneous attack from multiple directions, but at this rate, not one of them is even going to reach the house,” Sera observed.

“I’d be surprised if any of them manages to remain standing after thirty seconds.”

The demon sighed. “No showtime for me, then.”

“Master...”

“Oh, hey there, Efil. Sorry, did we wake you?”

Efil, who had already changed from her negligee into her customary maid uniform, joined us at the balcony. *Kudos to her for even arriving with her bow in hand.*

“Anyone would notice with all the noise. Except for Melfina-sama, I suppose. She is a bit special...”

Ah, right. Silent Whisper is stopping sound from escaping the grounds, but we’re still hearing everything just fine in here. Melfina...well, she’s just tired! Yep!

I gave Efil an update on the situation, after which she offered, “Would you like me to snipe the targets who are still lurking on the street? They’re the ones marked on the map in the Network, right?”

“Nah, better not,” I replied. “Not that I doubt your shooting skills. I know you’d hit them for sure, but we *are* still inside the city. There

could be some unrelated civilians wandering around. And, if possible, I want to interrogate their leader, so we'll need him ali—

“Ah, it seems like Rion's already finished up while we were talking. Clotho, Absorb all the bodies. If you come across one who's still breathing, give him the most basic treatment and take him into custody. Given how thoughtful Rion is, I'm sure she's left at least one or two alive, even if barely. We'll hand them over to the guild tomorrow.

“In any case, it seems like everything's been taken care of, so I'm going to nab the ones still outside nice and quick. Efil, stay here for when Rion comes back. I think she'll probably want a bath.”

“You're heading outside...alone, Master?” Efil asked before turning to give Sera a look.

“Gotcha. Kelvin, I'm coming along.”

“Uh, I'm perfectly fine going alo—”

“No, you may not.”

“Oh no you don't!”

C'mon, you two. You worry too much!



They're late, thought the Black Ops captain.

It had been a while since his subordinates infiltrated the grounds, but there had been no word from them since. Even stranger, no sounds had been heard from inside the estate. The darkness that had seemed so familiar and empowering mere minutes before now felt increasingly foreign and ominous with every passing moment.

Don't tell me they failed?!

Standard procedure was to immediately retreat if an execution unit should fail to check in by a predetermined time. Slowly but steadily, that time was drawing near.

Shit! We'll have to cut them loose. The captain signaled for the others on standby to beat a retreat. *Hm? That's strange. Why is there no response?*

He repeated the signal a few more times, but the only thing that came back was the sound of the wind.

What's going on? It's almost as if I'm the...only one...left...alive...?!

A cold sweat ran down his back as he came to that terrible conclusion. He didn't want to believe it. His thoughts spun in circles, and he was no longer in any state to make decisions. The only feelings in his head now were bewilderment, terror, and confusion.

Hold on. What if it wasn't the Heroes who defeated Christoph-sama...

His uncertainty did not last for long. Before he knew it, he had far bigger problems to worry about.

“Oh, hey, you didn't run away. Are you still here because you're

worried about your comrades? Kudos to you, Otto-kun.”



The nation of Trycen, situated on the eastern side of the Eastern Continent, was by no means a bountiful land. Aside from the capital and its immediate surroundings, most of the country was desert, and food was in short supply all year round.

In addition, due to having been founded by mercenary groups that had banded together, the country was known for being politically belligerent and was very hostile towards foreigners.

During the era of the great war, Trycen had expanded aggressively for the sake of securing additional resources and expended an enormous amount of slave labor in reclamation efforts. Ever since the signing of the ceasefire agreement, the country had at least made a token effort at seeming peaceful. However, its relations with its three neighboring countries were notably weak.

At the moment, the military kingdom was in a precarious position. It was under censure first from Toraj, then Deramis and Gaun as well after what was now known as “The Black Wind Incident.”

An adventurer, Christoph, who Trycen had extolled as a “champion,” had been exposed as the chief of a bandit gang and was determined to be responsible for kidnapping women and children and selling them as slaves. The Heroes of Deramis, who had saved the gang’s victims, had given their recorded testimony, forcing Christoph and his companions to confess their plans to send slaves to Trycen. There was no way for Trycen to talk its way out of their predicament.

At present, the top echelons of the country were gathering in the Roundtable Room of Trycen Castle, where the most confidential matters of state were discussed. Only royalty and a limited number of nobles and top military personnel were allowed in.

At the center of the room was a heavily ornamented round table made of wood. Currently, it was occupied by the king of the country, King Zel Trycen, and the generals of the various branches of his military forces.

King Zel was the first one to break the tense silence. “Thank you for gathering on such short notice, everyone.”

“That bastard Clive isn’t here yet, old man.”

The person who had called the king “old man” was Crown Prince Azgrad Trycen, general of the Dragon Knight Order. He was in his seat not because of any favoritism on his father’s part, but because he himself had earned the respect of the entire nation with his achievements and unparalleled talent.

Trycen had five princes, of which he was the only one who held the post of general, the highest position in the army. The contrast

between him and Tabura — the fifth prince and the one who had gotten a solid beating from Kelvin — served as proof beyond any doubt that within this meritocratic kingdom, blood relation alone was not enough to reach the top. Azgrad's well-trained body far surpassed that of any common military commander's, and he also displayed exemplary proficiency with riding dragons.

"Then again, he's probably just drowning himself with women in his room. The fact that he's considered capable enough to share the table with us makes me want to puke," Azgrad spat as he shot a glance at the only empty chair.

"There's no time. We'll begin without him. As I'm sure you all know, Christoph has been apprehended by the Heroes of Deramis. Our plans were only just taking off, too, so the timing couldn't be worse."

The original idea had been to use the cover of the bandit gang Black Wind to acquire slaves through kidnapping. Everything had gone swimmingly with the subjugation of the original gang leader, the highly conspicuous announcement of Christoph's feat, and the brainwashing of the gang's remnants. Yet even after all their detailed planning, this fiasco was the result.

"The idea was yours, Tristan." Zel's sharp eyes were directed at Tristan Faaze, general of the Mixed Monster Order and scion of the prestigious and noble Faaze family.

Although the word "monster" was in the name of his branch, it included not only tamed monsters, but demihuman slaves as well. This man, who was in complete agreement with the country's ideology of human supremacy, was the one who had suggested the Black Wind plan to King Zel in an effort to bolster his own forces.

"How embarrassing, really. I had expected quite a lot from them, too. I suppose that's what I get for putting my faith in barbaric, uncivilized adventurers," Tristan replied, raising his hands and shrugging in a dramatic fashion.

"Tristan, we have no interest in your smarmy self-justifications. What His Majesty wants to know is how you plan to take responsibility for this scandal. Because of this incident, our country has been cast in an extremely unfavorable light. The other three nations have begun talks of an alliance!"

It was the old knight Dan D'Alba who had snapped at Tristan. He was a battleworn warrior who had served Trycen long and well. Now, he was the general of the Steel Knight Order, a branch of the army that included a wide variety of troops, including heavy infantry equipped with steel armor, cavalry specialized for mobility, and squads that handled siege weaponry. It had also been Dan who had taught Azgrad the sword, and the trust between the two was strong.

"No need to get all crabby, General Dan. It'll shorten your

lifespan, you know?"

"What did you say?" Dan stood up slowly, glaring daggers at Tristan. Most men would have pissed themselves faced with the furious aura that he was emanating, but Tristan merely returned the glare with a lazy half-smile.

"Stand down, you two. Remember that you sit before His Majesty," a voice that seemed very much out of place in the room rang out.

"But Shutola-sama..."

"General Dan."

"I — as you wish."

After a brief moment of silence, Dan sat back down.

The name of the young girl who had quelled the old knight's anger was Shutola Trycen, Zel's only daughter and Trycen's only princess. Her appearance was so beautiful and elegant that all the troops and citizens harbored serious doubts that she and Tabura had been birthed by the same mother.

It was with her quick wit and sharp mind that she had become not only the first female general in Trycen's history, but also the youngest. The branch that she headed, Black Ops, had been in decline year by year, however. Whether Zel had appointed her to this position merely to appease the nobles or because he actually had high expectations of her was something that only he knew.

"Heh, you're as soft on the princess as ever," Tristan snorted with a provocative smirk. When he saw that his opponent had decided to merely ignore him, he sighed in disappointment. "Well, that's no fun."

"That's enough horseplay, Tristan. Dan is right; our country is in a very precarious position. We have already revoked Christoph's status as a champion and denied our connection with him, but I don't expect it to be enough. If we handle this badly, we could end up in a war against all three of our neighbors at the same time. That is, unless you, as a general, take responsibility here."

The king's killing intent was undisguised, and his words carried the weight characteristic of a monarch.

Even so, Tristan remained unmoved. "Then how about...let's do it? War, I mean."

"What?"

"Since the signing of the ceasefire, our country has been steadily amassing military strength. Ever since, what, my grandfather's grandfather's...*grandfather's* time, I think? Well, that's not important." Tristan cleared his throat briefly. "Think about it. While we've been doing everything we can to expand our forces, what have the other nations been doing? They're busy spouting empty platitudes about peace and twiddling their thumbs! Those weaklings could come at us

all together and still not be our match. Is there any better time to realize our age-old dream of unifying the continent? I say, let's decide this with a Vote of the Generals!"

"It is true that the unification of the continent is our ultimate goal."

"Oh, so you agree with me, Shutola-sama!"

"*However*, I do not think that now is the time. The other nations are not as complacent as you make them out to be. If Trycen is to make a move, it should be the generation after ours."

Tristan skillfully enacted exaggerated expressions of delight and despair in response to her words. "How saddening it is to find Shutola-sama, she who commands such adoration from the masses, in disagreement with my lowly self! Is your conclusion based on the information that your little birds bring to you?"

"Who knows?"

"I am in support of going to war."

"Esteemed Brother?!"

It was Azgrad who had just thrown in his vote. Shutola was so caught off guard that her composed face gave away to astonishment.

"I've participated in several tussles with Gaun's troops, and they did not feel all that powerful. I hate to say it, but our country's power has shot up considerably since that bastard Clive joined us. In addition, my Dragon Knight Order has...well, you know all about it."

Tristan nodded with glee. "Right, right, the one you spent so much money to purchase? That makes two 'for' and one 'against'!"

Shutola clicked her tongue. "Evoking a Vote of the Generals for something like this..."

The Vote of the Generals was a system employed by Trycen where its five generals could vote on a matter to ask the king to consider. The final decision naturally lay with the monarch, but the influence of the system could hardly be scoffed at. After all, dismissing out of hand something that the majority of the generals had agreed upon meant alienating more than half of the country's military forces.

On the other hand, the generals could not invoke the system lightly, either. If the one who brought up the matter could not manage to gather a majority vote, he would be subject to punishment as decided by the king. At times, such a penalty might be fairly light, but in the worst case, it could mean death.

Considering the topic of the vote this time around, the repercussions of failure would be anything but light. Tristan's behavior was casual, but in truth, he was betting his life.

"I am naturally against the idea! You two must be mad!" cried D'Alba.

"Ahh, what a pity. That leaves us at a tie. The remaining vote lies

with General Clive, but he's not here. Whatever shall we do?"

As everyone's gazes turned towards Clive's empty chair, the king burst into mirthful laughter.

"Turns out you have some real nerve, Tristan! Very well. With your life on the line, I'll acknowledge the Vote. Someone bring Clive here at once!"



"Ugh, why do I have to come to a place like this?" sighed Jin D'Alba, lieutenant general of the Steel Knight Order. This man, clad in a shiny, silver suit of armor, was the son of General Dan D'Alba.

General Clive Teraaze had shown no sign of heeding the king's summons, so Jin had been tasked with visiting the Magic Knight Order's headquarters to fetch the truant general in person. This was normally a task for someone much farther down the chain of command, but as Clive was being called to the Roundtable Room, which most personnel were strictly forbidden from entering, the assignment had fallen to someone of the lowest possible rank allowed into the room.

That person just happened to be Jin.

"In the past, I would have loved the opportunity to come take a peek, but..."

The Magic Knight Order, a cornerstone of Trycen's army, was composed entirely of females. Many of them hailed from prominent families and therefore had demure personalities and exquisite features. Within the otherwise male-dominated army, this branch had been like a flower on a high peak, a Shangri-La that was so close and yet just out of reach. Until *that* man had come along.

Jin imagined the irritated face of his waiting father as he continued to plod forward. He eventually found himself before the door to Clive's room. Along the way, he had passed several female knights in the corridors, but they had simply bobbed their heads in greeting. Several months ago, every one of them would have stopped to give him a sharp salute, as they were supposed to do in light of his rank.

What's more, they all seem distracted, as if their minds are elsewhere. It's like their eyes are devoid of light, I guess? Or like they've been drained of vitality? I'm not quite sure how to put it.

Jin shook his head to pull himself out of his thoughts as he sharply rapped on the door. After a brief moment, a voice came from within.

"Who's that...? It's not locked, come on in..." Although the voice itself was clear and beautiful, the tone was listless and had a lazy drawl.

Jin heaved another sigh, then placed his hand on the doorknob. "Pardon me, I'm entering the room!"

He threw open the door, revealing a dim chamber filled with incense smoke that gave off a strange smell. Danger Detection set off alarms inside the young knight's head, and he resolved to finish his business and escape as quickly as possible.

The curtains were closed, with the little bit of light spilling through the cracks being far from enough to illuminate the room to any satisfactory degree. At the far end of the chamber was a gigantic bed, on top of which were wriggling movements that Jin could not see clearly from his position. The articles of female clothing strewn all over the floor were quite unmistakable, however.

"You're...not a subordinate of mine. Who're you?"

A humanoid silhouette appeared from the darkness, with the head alone turning his way. The height of the figure was roughly 180 cm, which was about the same as Jin himself. The well-toned muscles did speak to a significant amount of training, but it was the face that was the most eye-catching. A face that seemed carved with the world's most perfect proportions, made to steal the heart of any village or town girl with nothing more than a smile.

Not that noble women would stand much more of a chance. After all, there's at least one lying in the bed, isn't there?

"Sir! I am Lieutenant General Jin D'Alba of the Steel Knight Order!"

"Uhhh...ahhh, from Dan-san's place," Clive replied, striking an "I remember now!" pose.

"His Majesty has issued a summons to a Roundtable Conference. General Clive, you are obliged to attend with the utmost urgency!"

"Whaaat, so troublesome! I'm quite busy right now, you know?" Clive disappeared back into the darkness, and the bed started creaking rhythmically.

Jin was nearing the end of his rope, but he took a breath and reminded himself that anything rash would reflect badly on his father.

"A Vote of the Generals has been called. The topic of the vote cannot be disclosed here, but it is currently at a stalemate."

The creaking stopped abruptly. "Who invoked the Vote?"

"I am not at liberty to disclose it here."

"Hmm...guess it can't be helped, then," the general drawled as he pulled himself out of the bed. "I hope it's Shutola-chan!"

In the dim light, Jin thought he saw the perfectly proportioned face twist into the mask of a monster.



"And that's about all the information that we managed to get out

of him,” I said.

“Hrm. Looks like Trycen’s finally making their move,” murmured Guildmaster Rio.

After successfully capturing the man who seemed like the leader of last night’s intruders, I had asked Sera to do the same thing she’d done to the Black Wind bandits. As a result, the guy had sung like a lark.

This man, Otto, turned out to be one of the captains of the “Black Ops” branch of Trycen’s army. According to him, his country had a total of five divisions, each of which had a hierarchy of general, lieutenant general, colonel, and captain.

Otto’s own squad was a small-scale one. Not that I was surprised to hear it — there wasn’t much point in spies conducting assassinations or espionage missions in large numbers. Funnily enough, this fellow had actually believed Christoph to be a true champion and that his exposure as the chief of Black Wind had been a frame job. And for that, boy oh boy did he *hate* me and the Heroes very much.

The fact that a captain — admittedly the bottom of the ladder as far as their organization went, but a leadership position nonetheless — was so misinformed led me to believe that only the top echelons knew the truth. *Information control sure is a scary thing, isn’t it?*

Once we had extracted all of the information we could, Sera cast an even stronger version of Hypnosis on the guy, and we threw him into our makeshift jail under the house. Then we went to inform Rio of our findings, and that’s where we were at the moment.

“Despite their vehement denials of any connection to Black Wind, and their ardent efforts to smooth things over, to turn around and plan an assassination! The mastermind behind this seems to be Crown Prince Azgrad, as far as I can tell, but I don’t have enough information to be sure. Hmm, should I — all right, I should probably tell you. Actually, there’s been quite a lot of movement on Trycen’s borders as of late.”

“Meaning?”

“Trycen and Gaun have had little skirmishes along their border every now and then, but none of it has been all that conspicuous or large-scale. Trycen also seems to have been making an effort not to touch Parth, as the City of Peace, and Toraj, from whom they import most of their food.

“Lately, however, they’ve been conducting rather forcible ‘reconnaissance missions’ and have become more obvious about their abductions and enslavement of foreign civilians. I believe that something must have happened within the country that has radicalized their moderate faction. At this rate, Trycen could very well

sound the drums of war again.”

“An actual war...”

“Likely so.”

After the Black Wind incident had been blown wide open, Toraj, Deramis, and Gaun had joined forces to rebuke and censure the warmongering kingdom. The official reply from Trycen had always been one of feigned innocence, but there was too much evidence for them to worm their way out of it. And now it seemed like that violent country, finally backed into a corner, had decided to say, “Screw it!” and take on the rest of the continent all at once.

Anyone with a logical mind can see how ill-advised their train of thought is.

“Everything I’ve just said is only my personal prediction, so take it with a grain of salt,” Rio continued. “However, you should probably look out for yourself. Based on what this Otto fellow said, it looks like you have a target painted on your back, Kelvin-kun.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. Thanks.” At any rate, it wouldn’t hurt to stay vigilant. *I should probably pick up the pace on finishing Rion’s gear.*

“Oh, by the way, I happen to have a quest for you, Kelvin-kun.”

“A special quest from you? Feels like it’s been a while since the last one.”

“Actually, this time it isn’t coming directly from me. It’s from Leonhart Gaun, the Beast King.”

Rio produced an almost excessively fancy envelope from his chest pocket with the nonchalance of retrieving his pipe for a smoke.

Chapter 3: The Village of Elves

“Phew, that was quite the run. So, the Village of Elves is located somewhere in this forest?”

My party and I were currently deep in the Forest of Crests, a verdant maze located in the southeastern part of Gaun, close to the border of Trycen. After reading the letter from Beast King Leonhart, we had taken a few days to prepare and then gone straight there in person. The journey had been shorter than expected, as our speed on foot was now several times that of what a horse could manage.

The contents of the letter had been straightforward. In what was presumably King Leonhart’s very own hand were the words “Notification of Rank S Promotion Exam.” It had been so unexpected that I’d almost fallen over with surprise. The bold brush strokes went well with the contents of the letter to deliver an incredibly impactful impression. My immediate reaction had been, *Why is the king of Gaun the one issuing my promotion exam?!*

Luckily, Rio had been close at hand to provide some much-needed explanation. According to him, there were a total of four conditions that needed to be met for an adventurer to be promoted to Rank S:

- 1) Clear ten consecutive quests ranked A or higher.
- 2) Experience with clearing a Rank S quest.
- 3) Acknowledgment from at least two of the four monarchs in power on the Eastern Continent (this condition was different on the Western Continent).
- 4) Successfully pass the promotion exam under the supervision of an incumbent Rank S adventurer.

In my case, the first two conditions had already been met, which left only the third and fourth points. And it was those that Leonhart’s letter was addressing.

Rio had already done the legwork and obtained acknowledgment from the Queen of Toraj, the only monarch that I knew personally. She had apparently given her approval without blinking an eye. *I guess connections are important no matter what world you’re in.*

However, I still needed acknowledgment from one other monarch. Trycen was not likely to be cooperative about anything at the moment, so that left Gaun and Deramis, and it just so happened that the Beast King of Gaun was the first one to respond.

The royal family of Gaun had a custom where the children were

required to set out on a journey of training once they turned ten. After making it all the way to Rank S during his own trek, King Leonhart had returned to immediately clinch the championship at a battle royale hosted to determine the strongest person in the land, thus solidifying his claim to the throne.

I'm hardly in a position to say this of someone else, but he got up to quite a lot of trouble, didn't he?

The letter I had received from this impressive ruler had been an offer for him to personally oversee my promotion exam as a Rank S adventurer himself. He would merely be observing from the shadows, though, which meant that I wouldn't actually meet him.

As I was wondering just how the matter had blown up to such epic proportions, Rio explained that Tsubaki-sama had been talking King Leonhart's ear off in praise of me. Even in the country of beastkin, a place that valued strength above all else, Rank S candidates were hard to come by. In other words, the king's interest had been piqued, and he was serving as proctor to take a look at me with his own eyes.

"This place feels...nostalgic, for some reason," Efil murmured as she absentmindedly stared at the trees spread out before us.

"Isn't that because you're half-elf?" I replied. "The elven blood in you might be responding to the thick magic coming from the forest."

Sera interjected, "But aren't elves a race that came from the Western Continent? I've heard of adventurers and merchants encountering wandering elves every once in a while, but was taught that their main settlement isn't located around here."

Pure-blood elves were insular and hard to come by. Just as Sera said, the few wandering about the Eastern Continent of their own free will were generally outliers.

"According to Rio, a group of them emigrated to the Eastern Continent a few decades ago and set up a settlement here. Even he didn't know the reason for it, but in any case, they are now under Gaun's protection."

Gerard nodded understandingly. "Ahh, and the aim of our exam is to protect this settlement."

The task, as set out in the letter from King Leonhart, was to subjugate the as-yet unverified monsters that were terrorizing the elven village. Unfortunately, what was happening to the elves was likely part of the same trouble that was cropping up on all of Trycen's borders with its neighbors. As for what was actually wrong...dangerous new monsters had been showing up in the forest as of late.

While the native inhabitants of the region were creatures that could easily be subjugated by Rank D adventurers, there was a new

breed wandering around with Rank B monsters in tow. Based on that fact alone, it was thought that this new threat was likely Rank S itself. The average Gaunian soldier couldn't even stand up to its followers one-on-one, much less do anything about the big bad those monsters were accompanying. Consequently, the fight was not going well, to put it mildly.

Normally, in a case like this, the king or more powerful members of the army would be deployed to handle the problem. However, the recent increase in overall monster aggression was stretching Gaun's military resources thin already. From King Leonhart's perspective, it was a good opportunity to kill two birds with one stone: he could gauge my strength *and* have this problem resolved without having to personally get involved. I didn't mind the arrangement, myself. After all, it wasn't every day that I got to fight a Rank S monster.

"Kel-nii, you think Trycen is involved in this somehow?"

"Almost certainly, yeah. Elves don't age, and both males and females have very attractive appearances. I wouldn't be surprised by the idea of people wanting them as slaves."

"Just like yourself, my king?"

"That's right, just like Kelvin!"

"Mhm, those words do sound convincing coming from you, honey."

Why are you guys looking at me? I haven't done anything that Efil herself didn't want! And I don't ever plan to, either!

"So, elf characters were your thing, Kel-nii?"

"That's a misunderstanding, Rion."

This was something I had noticed only recently, but Rion's knowledge was actually quite skewed. With one prominent example being how she routinely burst in on my bath, supposedly because "Siblings are supposed to bathe together!" I suspected she had probably consumed a lot of manga and light novels during her previous life, and had taken everything depicted within as truth. As her new brother, it was my duty to give her a proper education.

Just as I added that new and highly noble goal to my mental to-do list, Efil tugged my sleeve slightly, saying, "Please don't let it bother you, Master. I love you with all my heart, and I take great pride in being your slave."

I knew it; Efil has got to be an angel.



The forest where the elves lived was called the Forest of Crests because of the magical crests carved into so many of the trees all throughout the region. According to Analyze Eye, they served to maintain a magical barrier that helped to repel intruders. The fact that

we were equally subject to their effects was a problem, though. I had Sera take a look from up in the air, but the barrier went so far as to project an illusion from above, preventing the settlement's location from being pinpointed that way.

"Honey, I'll go ahead and buff your directional senses, all right?"

"Hmm...it's that way, Kelvin!"

"I see, I see...Kel-nii, the little bird said that the village is that way!"

"Master, I feel the sensation of nostalgia I mentioned coming strongly from that direction."

Fortunately, my concerns about finding the village were unfounded. Melfina had her spells, Sera had her intuition, Rion could strike up a rapport with the local wildlife and ask for directions, and Efil had whatever pull she was feeling from her elven blood. In short, we had a plethora of ways to circumvent the magical barriers.

We struck a straight path through the trees that soon brought us before a pair of watchtowers and a large wooden wall.

What if we had gotten lost on the way? Who would subjugate the monsters then? Of course, I suppose getting through on our own is meant to be part of the exam...

Unfortunately, we had not encountered the Rank S monster or any of its lackeys along the way.

"You there, stop!" shouted a voice from one of the watchtowers as we approached the gate. "This forest is protected by magic! You cannot have wandered here by mistake! Identify yourselves!"

Looking up, we spotted three elves aiming drawn arrows in our direction.

"We are here in response to a royal summons from King Leonhart. I am the adventurer Kelvin, and this is my party."

"An emissary from His Majesty?"

"This is our letter of introduction. Please have a look." I held up the letter of introduction penned by Leonhart, which Rio had given to me before we left, then used Green Magic to generate a gentle breeze that brought the letter up and into the elf's hand.

"Hold on a moment, we'll go check with the Elder. Please wait here."

"Sure thing; no problem."

Wow, straight to the Elder. No surprise, given the letter is from the king himself. It sure works wonders to have such contacts. Although it does bother me a bit that the other two are still pointing their arrows at us. I guess they must be on edge from all the recent attacks.

It wasn't long before the guard who'd taken my letter returned.

"Thank you for waiting. We welcome you as guests. Please accept my apologies for the unpleasant reception. Open the gates!"

The wooden door rose up with a deep rumbling sound. We walked through and found a large number of elves gathered in what must have been the main square of the village. Every one of them looked young and beautiful, without a single wrinkle or sign of age on any of their faces.

At the front of the crowd stood a single male. *Is he the "Elder"?* *Damn, even he looks young.*

"Thank you for coming all this way. I am Nellas, the Elder of this village."

Ah, so I was right. "Nice to meet you. I'm Kelvin, and..." I proceeded to introduce my companions one by one.

But when I got to Efil...

Thud!

"H-How can this be?!"

"Elder? What is the matter?"

The moment he laid eyes on Efil, the elf's knees gave way and he fell flat on his butt. A few others within the crowd looked extremely startled as well.

"R-Rumil?! Why...how are you still alive?!"

Uh...who's Rumil?



After Nellas regained his composure, the commotion quickly died down, and the crowd dispersed. We were invited to his house, where we could resume the conversation in private.

As we settled into the sofas, a serving woman brought us drinks that looked like black tea but gave off a fragrance unfamiliar to me.

What kind of tea is this?

::Judging from the smell, it's a high-class blend using several varieties of magic-abundant herbs that can be found in this forest.::

Professor Melfina had answered my question without missing a beat. *To be able to identify it from the smell alone...she sure is high-specced in the weirdest places. So, the fact that we're being served high-class tea probably means that we're being welcomed, right? In that case, why were the elves so surprised just now?*

"Kelvin-dono, I'm terribly sorry about that," the Elder apologized.

"Oh, don't worry about it. I'm not bothered, and neither is Efil. Rather than an apology..."

"You wish to know why I reacted that way, yes?"

"If you're willing to tell us, we're happy to listen."

After lowering his eyes for a moment in thought, Nellas raised his head to look at me and Efil in turn.

"Very well. This is a story that isn't directly related to the request from His Majesty, but it is extremely important to you, Efil-san."

“Important to me?” I could see Efil unconsciously clenching her fists just above her knees.

“This was something that happened far back when we were still living on the Western Continent...”



The Elder’s story went back about twenty years. At the time, the elves had been living peacefully deep within a forest on the Western Continent. Just like in the Forest of Crests, that settlement had also been hidden behind several layers of magical barriers and had almost no contact with the outside world. There were elves who would leave of their own volition, but the vast majority of the population stayed sequestered in the village.

Elves had always been a target for other races due to their rarity and beautiful appearances. This was one reason why they had become so insular, and even now, they only ever associated regularly with the beastkin.

Years ago, the elves had taken the extreme measure of emigrating to another continent after a devastating encounter with a dragon. And it was no ordinary dragon, but one of the eminent kings of the dragon race, the Flame Dragon King. His strength was far beyond that of the beast we had faced in Toraj. Despite both monsters being Rank S, the Flame Dragon King was at the most powerful end of the spectrum.

The Flame Dragon King’s nest was located at the mouth of a volcano far enough away that he would normally have had no reason to become involved with the elves. But that fateful day, something changed. The weather was beautiful, and the sky was a clear blue. The trees rustled in a gentle breeze, and the sun shone warmly.

Then, a shadow fell over the village square. Everyone who noticed it thought that it was a cloud at first. But as it gradually grew larger, they began to grow suspicious. The real indication of danger was when the trees surrounding the village were suddenly torn up by massive gusts of wind. The protective barrier that had been cast upon the forest gave way as a huge red form crashed into their midst.

“BRING ME THE ELF WHO HAS DISGRACED ME! IF NOT, I WILL REDUCE YOU ALL TO ASHES ALONG WITH YOUR PRECIOUS FOREST!”

Every elf present had been stupefied, their minds scrambling to comprehend the situation they suddenly found themselves in. As they looked on in dumbfounded astonishment, the unfortunate villager who happened to be closest was snapped up in the blink of an eye. He likely hadn’t even registered the fact that he was being eaten.

“NOOOOOOOOOO!”

All hell descended upon the village. The forest was set ablaze as

the elves ran about in a panic. The dragon was eating people indiscriminately, men, women and children alike, and those who escaped his jaws soon succumbed to the greedy flames.

When the population had been reduced to roughly a fourth of its original number, something extraordinary happened. A lone woman stood up before the dragon, saying, "I offer myself to take the remainder of your anger. In exchange, please let everyone else go!"

The elf who had presented herself with calm and composure had been exceptionally beautiful even for her kind, and possessed a great and generous heart. Even the dragon awoke from his frenzied rage after setting eyes on her and stopped his rampage.

"You are not the elf that I am searching for. Yet your beauty is such that even I, as a member of a different race, find you attractive and appealing to the eye. Very well. If you agree to be my wife, I am willing to write off the disgrace that your compatriot caused me."

High-tiered dragons had the ability to take on humanoid form. In other words, they could conceive children with other races if they so wished. The matter of what had first enraged the Flame Dragon King was still unclear, but at least there was a path to reconciliation.

After a brief internal struggle, the woman replied, "I will agree to be your wife. But may I have a bit of time to say farewell to my family and friends?"

"Very well. I will return tonight. Do what you have to do by then. I'm sure there is no need to say this, but do not think of running away."

With those words, the monster took off into the sky. The woman watched as he disappeared into the distance, and once she was sure that he had departed, fell to her knees and burst into tears. She was still young and had been engaged. But her fiancé had fallen into the dragon's belly and was now lost.

The village Elder had also lost his life during the commotion, leaving his son, Nellas, to step in as their new leader. Under normal circumstances, it was customary to celebrate such an event with merriment and feasting, but that was the last thing on anyone's mind at present.

Thrust into the role, Nellas found himself facing several tasks of enormous weight, not the least of which was monitoring the woman who was to be the dragon's wife to ensure that she did not run away, and figuring out how to rebuild their race after the devastating attack.

Under watchful eyes, the condemned woman spent her precious remaining time with her surviving relatives. Then night fell, and the promised time arrived.

The dragon returned, the loud flapping of its enormous wings banishing the silence. There were no longer tears on the woman's

face. Just before she was taken away, the last words she uttered were, "Please forget about me."

Several years later, the woman's body was found lying in the forest. Filled with fear by this discovery, the elves decided to abandon their ancestral home. The survivors of their race banded together and headed for new lands, pinning their hopes on the country of Gaun on the Eastern Continent.



"And that is the story of how our race came to live here," Nellas concluded. "Even to this day, none of us know why the Flame Dragon King attacked us, nor do we know who the elf was who angered him so."

A heavy atmosphere had enveloped the room. I cleared my throat lightly. "And the woman who was taken away by the dragon was..."

"Rumil, yes. She was the one I mistook Efil-san for."

So, if I'm getting this right, this Rumil was Efil's mother and...hold on, her father is the Flame Dragon King?!

::That isn't possible, honey. Efil is a half-elf, which means she was born from the union of a human and an elf. She would be an entirely different race if the Flame Dragon King were to have been her father::

Oh, okay, then.

I sighed in relief. *The mystery deepens. Which reminds me, Efil was suffering from the Curse of the Flame Dragon King when I first met her. Now the curse has been reversed into a blessing, but she suffered for a long time because of it. Then again, the case could be made that it was because of the curse that she and I came together, but...hold on, how is Efil taking this?!*

Nellas continued speaking. "I knew Rumil personally, and I saw her body with my own eyes. Efil-san, I'm so sorry to say this, but..."

"It's all right, Nellas-sama. I've never known a father or a mother in my life. I don't have any memories of either. So there is no need to worry about me. I have Master and all my companions now," Efil replied, resting her head on my shoulder.

Guess I don't need to worry after all.

"So, you have found your lifelong companion. As one of your race, I am happy for you."

"What? Oh, no, Master and I aren't like that!"

Efil was all flustered in a rare show of embarrassment. Feeling the holes being bored into my back by Sera's and Melfina's gazes, I couldn't bring myself to respond. *As they say, silence is golden.*



Learning something about Efil's birth, even if it was just on her mother's side, was an unexpected bonus. However, our goal in coming here had been to protect the elves. It was about time to move on to the real business.

"Nellas-san, do you have a map of the area around the village?" I asked.

"A map? Of course we do," he replied, signaling the serving woman.

You don't have to rush that much, I thought, as she exited the room in a hurry. "According to what I was told, a new species of monster and its followers are going around kidnapping your people. Is that correct?"

"Yes, that's right. We have a barrier cast throughout the forest that confuses the directional senses of those who step inside, but it appears to be ineffective against these new creatures."

Well, that sort of barrier can be circumvented with the right skills. We just proved it ourselves. It wouldn't be surprising for high-level monsters to be capable of the same thing.

"We have suffered three raids so far. Strangely, they do not attack us unless we attack them first. If we don't fight back, they are willing to retreat peacefully after grabbing several of our inhabitants."

"That sounds awfully organized for monsters." *They show self-discipline, don't kill unnecessarily, and are able to stick to their orders to kidnap the elves?*

"Naturally, we tried resisting at first. But our strength was insufficient to take down even the weaker ones. The soldiers deployed by Gaun did not fare much better. Now, all we can do is wait in fear for the fiends to take their leave in order to prevent any further unnecessary sacrifices."

At this rate, the elves will have no choice but to abandon this settlement and move again. Although the Elder hasn't said so, I imagine it's a decision he's already weighing in his mind.

"You may rest easy, Nellas-dono," said Gerard. "We have come to stop that very thing from happening ever again."

"That's right. We promise to protect you all," Melfina added.

Rion raised a clenched fist in a show of confidence. "Alex and I will do our best!" The shadow wolf followed up with an "Arf!"

Clearly, my companions were plenty motivated, perhaps due to Efil's ties to the village. I felt much the same myself.

"And there you have it, Nellas-san. My party is more than eager to get started. To that end, I have a question: may we have permission to make a few changes to the village?"

"Changes? Are you planning to set up traps?"

"Something like that. Once we have your permission, I promise

that never again will a monster touch a hair on any of your heads.”

“If nothing is done, the number of victims will only climb. Very well. Do as you see fit, Kelvin-dono.”

“Thank you very much.”

All right, we’ve got permission. Looks like things are about to get busy!



“Elder, we’ve done what the adventurers asked us to, but...”

“Kelvin-dono, what is all this?”

Half a day after my party flew into action, the Village of Elves had undergone a complete makeover. I was extremely satisfied with our workmanship, and it was heartening to see the locals trembling with excitement and gratitude.

“Everything is prepared for the next monster assault. We did a pretty good job, if I do say so myself. As for the explanation...Mel, you want the honors?”

“Sure thing,” Melfina readily replied with a bright smile. “Nellasan and inhabitants of the village, may I have your attention please?”

Melfina was in an extremely good mood, likely because she had just consumed a frightening number of plates of the local cuisine. By now, she had shamelessly assumed the position of being the gluttonous member of our party. I shuddered to imagine the drain on our finances if I had been capable of Summoning her at the start of my journey. *Thank goodness she took so long to finish her artificial body.*

“First of all, the wooden wall around this village was almost entirely useless for stopping the invasion of Rank B monsters. It was nowhere near high enough, let alone strong enough.”

Based on the details the Elder had given us, most of the monsters that came for them were gigantic humanoids that sounded a lot like cyclopes or ogres. Against such opponents, the previous wall had been lacking in both durability and scale. Scars left by the previous assaults gave testament to that fact.

“So, what we have done is erect a new wall outside of the current one. This new fortification, created entirely with Green Magic, is three times higher and tough enough to withstand an assault by Rank A monsters. The top of this new wall can be accessed by stairs on the inside, and defenders are free to unleash both magic and arrows onto their assailants from above.

“Furthermore, the outer part of the wall is surrounded by a moat, with the sole entrance to the village being the drawbridge at the main gate. The drawbridge is, of course, made from the same material as the wall. The water in the moat, as you may guess, is not mere water. I would strongly advise you *not* to touch it under any circumstances, as it could kill you.”

“I...see...”

“Don’t worry, we’ll revert your village to the way it was once all of this is over,” I added. “Nothing we’ve done will permanently damage the environment.”

Basically, I had surrounded the village with multiple casts of Adamantite Rampart, Melfina had filled the surrounding trench with water, and Sera had spammed a ton of Black Magic spells into the new moat. To be honest, this was all merely insurance and for the sake of appearance. We had no intention of letting the monsters get close to the settlement in the first place.

“Then how about this, um...it is a watchtower, isn’t it?” asked Nellas.

“That’s right! It’s just a bit higher than usual is all,” Melfina answered.

What the Elder was pointing to with a trembling hand was the special tower that I had erected in the middle of the village square. I had taken to calling it the arrow tower, since it had been created for Efil’s exclusive use and was so much higher than the other watchtowers. I’d created it with Adamantite Rampart as well. *What a convenient spell that is. I can make almost any kind of building I want as long as I think of it as a collection of walls.*

“That is a platform built specially for Efil to snipe from,” Melfina continued. “It has been rendered invisible to anyone outside the walls with my Blue Magic spell False Fog. Thanks to the illusions offered by the barriers that you originally had in place, the effect is twofold!”

Nellas laughed incredulously. “But with the tower being that tall, how will she be able to hit her targets? As elves, we are quite confident in our archery skills, but even we —”

“Not to worry,” Efil said reassuringly. “Leave the cover fire to me.”

“There you have it. If Efil says she can do it, then she can do it. During our test run, every single arrow she shot landed precisely where it was meant to,” I said, holding up a bundle of rabbit-like monster carcasses and fruits commonly found in the forest. The rabbit creatures all had arrows protruding from their foreheads, and each fruit had been pierced right through the middle. Efil had hit them all flawlessly from up in her tower.

The elves erupted into cheers of approval.

With Melfina’s explanation complete, I proceeded to go over our plans for the coming fight.

“When the monsters arrive, Efil and I will provide support to the entire battlefield from that tower. Gerard will be protecting the drawbridge. Sera, Mel, Rion, and Alex will be outside of the walls to intercept the assault.”

Clotho was going to be our secret ace. Depending on how the initial confrontation went, I would be Summoning the slime wherever it was needed as the ultimate hit-and-run force.

“Oh, and just in case, I’ll be posting several golems around as well. Each of them has the strength of a Rank A monster, so they should be of some use —”

“Kelvin-donoooooooo!”

“What is it?!” The Elder had suddenly grabbed my hands as tears streamed down his face. *What the hell’s going on?!*

“You must be the savior we have been waiting for all this time! Oh, Leonhart-sama! We cannot thank you enough for sending Kelvin-dono to our midst! Everyone, tonight we will host a feast!”

The elves roared with delight, bringing joy and hope back to drive out the depressing mood that had previously enveloped the village. *Even so, isn’t the Elder getting a bit too emotional?!*

After receiving the greatest amount of hospitality that the elves could offer, the only thing left was to actually protect the village. And afterwards, make Trycen pay, of course, as they were in all likelihood involved in some way.



When night fell, silence reigned in the Forest of Crests. The majority of creatures that lived there were diurnal and therefore back in their nests and fast asleep at this hour, leaving only a few species out and about.

This night, however, saw the presence of monsters that were not native to the ecosystem. Figures towering as high as trees, moving together in a group that looked far too orderly to be wild beasts doing their own things. In fact, if one were to put a name on it, it looked like an army of monsters.

“Lieutenant General, our preparations are done,” said a young man with a sharp salute.

Sitting on a fallen log before him was a man in his thirties. At both of their hips were whips that were more specialized for instilling obedience than for attacking. This characteristic identified the two of them as Tamers.

“That was faster than I expected.”

“Naturally! Today is our fourth time, after all. And what’s more, tonight is when we can finally round up all of those lowly subhumans! Although I understand we’re kidnapping them little by little to make Gaun divert its forces, we’ve all grown so bored with it. Don’t you feel the same, Lieutenant General?” the younger man asked with a nasty smirk.

Trycen was a country that touted human supremacy. Having been

taught this ideology from birth, the citizens considered demihuman slaves as being worth less than dirt. This young man was no exception. Of his own accord, he had enlisted with the Mixed Monster Order that used demihumans and monsters as slave troops. He had done so well that he had made the rank of colonel in spite of his young age.

“Like you wouldn’t believe! However, seeing the elves cowering helplessly *is* the funniest damn thing. They honestly believe we won’t attack them if they don’t resist.”

“Even though the kidnapped ones are either going to the labs or being assigned to the troops so they can let off some steam. Just saying, but I personally would never touch a filthy demihuman. Ugh, just thinking about it makes me feel dirty.”

“That’s because you’re a noble. It’s not all that bad, really. As they say, don’t knock it till you try it.”

“I think I’ll refrain. I’d rather throw them into the pens where my monsters sleep. Now *that’s* entertainment.”

“You *are* aware that that’s equally fucked up, right?”

Just then, the clouds that had been covering the moon moved off, with the illumination revealing the forces that were currently lying in wait around them. It was a host that easily numbered more than a thousand and represented an enormous variety of species, not only the giant types seen by the Elder. What’s more, each and every one of them were Rank B or higher.

Despite having the fewest number of human troops — rarely exceeding five hundred soldiers — the Mixed Monster Order was usually assigned to the front lines for Trycen’s battles. This was because every single one of its human members were Tamers, each of whom controlled numerous monsters. These Tamers felt no love or compassion for their slaves, seeing them merely as easily replaceable tools of war meant to be used up and discarded. During the age of the great war, Trycen had thrown hordes of these “disposable” monsters at its enemies to great effect, plunging many an opposing army into terror and despair.

At present, half of the Mixed Monster Order’s forces had been gathered. The man leading the operation was the order’s second-in-command, the lieutenant general.

“General Tristan’s idea was to purposely leak information to Gaun and crush the forces they deployed in response. We finally had some success with the last attempt, but the ones who came were mere foot soldiers. We’ve let enough stragglers go and given Gaun plenty of time to prepare, so I’m expecting some serious resistance on this fourth raid. Then again, if they *haven’t* sent any more troops over, we’ll just take our sweet time grabbing the elves, so it works out either way.”

“No worries, Lieutenant General. With all the troops we brought,

we could win hands down even if the Beast King himself and his sons show up. What's more, we have that monstrosity behind you."

Kneeling quietly behind the older man was an exceptionally large giant, around whose neck was a thick collar decorated with ancient script.

"Where does the general even get those collars? Not that I'm complaining. Thanks to them, it's become so much easier to capture monsters."

"I've only heard rumors, but supposedly they're being supplied by a merchant who's been visiting the castle quite frequently lately. I've no idea who he is, but I do know these collars have got to be pretty high-ranked items, considering how easily they subdue even the most fierce creatures. Then we have these specially-made ones that are effective against even Rank S monsters. I still can't help but marvel at their efficiency."

"I believe you told me that only three of those have been made, right? And that General Tristan actually gave one of them to Prince Azgrad?"

"What a waste, right? When I think of how much stronger that single collar could have made our order! But it's General Tristan we're talking about. I'm sure it was done with some specific idea in mind. Probably to make the prince indebted to him, if I had to guess."

"So now the prince owes him a favor?"

"I'm just saying 'maybe.' Anyway, it's about time. You know the plan, right? You'll be setting off with the Fourth Regiment first, then Colonel Dill will follow a short while afterwards with the Fifth Regiment."

"What about you, Lieutenant General?"

"Depends on how the situation plays out. All right, let's stomp some woodland scum!"

The lieutenant general raised his arm high, then brought it down in the direction of the village. The army of monsters began lumbering forward, their footsteps pounding a deep drumbeat of inexorable death.



Despite having progressed almost halfway through the forest, the Fourth Regiment — including the flying monsters that had been scouting ahead — had yet to see a hint of resistance.

"Colonel, looks like the cowards from Gaun aren't here. You think they got scared of us and ran?"

"With how much noise we're making, there's no way they haven't noticed us coming. Stay vigilant against an ambush just in case. It's the kind of pathetic strategy they would use."

Raucous laughter rose up from the soldiers gathered at the back of the procession. Did these Tamers seem so at ease because they thought they were in the safest position of the formation? Or was it because they felt protected standing behind so many strong and powerful monsters?

Either way, they continued swaggering onwards, clearly never having been taught that there was nowhere safe in a battle, or else having forced all such warnings from their minds. No one noticed anything when they stepped right into the kill zone.

“Ugh...” A Tamer that had been riding a monster suddenly slumped over.

The colonel, who happened to be looking in his direction at the time, asked in alarm, “What’s wrong?!”

A nearby soldier replied, “No idea, sir! He just fell over!”

The surrounding soldiers stepped over to wake their comrade up.

“You...what the —?!”

A small, well-defined hole between the man’s brows could be seen, almost as if something had bored straight through it. Blood was spurting from the hole. Even an amateur could tell that he was already dead.

“I-Is this from an arrow?”

“It can’t be! I didn’t hear any noise! And the scouts didn’t warn us! Besides, the settlement is still a ways off!”

“But then how do you expl—”

“Krghhh!”

The sound of another death cry rang out from a short distance away. A second victim had fallen.

“We’re under attack! We’re under attack!”

“Use the monsters as walls and protect yourselves! The enemy is using some kind of invisible assault!”

The relaxed atmosphere from a moment before was instantly replaced by panic and mayhem. The soldiers quickly ducked behind the monsters and trees, but anyone who tried to peek out promptly took an arrow to the head.

“I’ve never heard of such an attack before! Are we supposed to advance towards the settlement under these conditions?! It’s suicide!”

Slowly, the procession inched forward under the constant threat of this incomprehensible ambush. The face of the young colonel grew paler and paler by the minute.



“Efil, get the guy hiding behind the troll next.”

“Yes, Master.”

“Leave the one who looks higher-ranked than the rest. We’ll catch

him later to ask a few questions.”

From the moment Trycen’s force had come within range of Efil’s bow, she’d been picking them off one by one from up in her arrow tower. I was standing next to her and — after having borrowed Farsight with Skill Eater — providing some additional support.

From what I saw, all of the human soldiers were Tamers. The strategy they were going with seemed to be a simple brute-force frontal push. It was obvious, then, that the army would fall apart if we took out the soldiers in the back. After all, without their control, the monsters they were responsible for would lose any sense of purpose or direction. If these Tamers had been close to their monsters and actually took care of them, we would have used a different approach. But with these jokers, chances of that sort of bond were nil.

“Looks like the bow’s performing well,” I commented.

“I feel like if I just inject enough magic, I can shoot as far I want! Furthermore, it really is amazing that it doesn’t make any sound at all.”

The newest bow that I had presented to Efil was made for covert use. The way that Merciless worked was: the user would pour their magic into the bow to generate special arrows, and the range could be freely adjusted based on the amount of magic the weapon was imbued with.

In addition, it was absolutely silent to use — there was no creaking of the bowstring when drawing nor any whistling from the flight of the arrows themselves. Furthermore, the arrows were hidden by Concealment upon leaving the bow and disappeared altogether after striking their targets. It was a weapon that could kill silently and without leaving a trace of evidence.

Our guests have arrived. Whenever you guys see someone, pass the info along to me, and I’ll add it in.

Thanks to the map I had gotten from the Elder and a bit of scouting beforehand, I was now quite familiar with the surrounding terrain. All that was left to do was fill it in with the positions of our enemies. Thanks to Parallel Processing, I could give out orders while updating the map in real time.

::You youngsters have fun out there!::

::You bet we will!:: Sera replied. ::You won’t get any time in the spotlight tonight, Gerard, so just stay where you are and take a nap!::

::Sera, you remember that we aren’t supposed to kill them all, right?:: Melfina chided.

::Thanks for the reminder, Mel-nee. We’ve gotta catch the important-looking one, right?::

If possible, yes. But our top priority is protecting the village. And try to keep damage to the environment to a minimum.

I watched as Sera, Melfina, and Rion all scattered out into the forest.

All right, let's stomp some monsters!





I dashed through the trees, heading towards my destination with movements as light and graceful as an acrobat's. *Oh, the map's saying there are enemies ahead.*

Efil had confirmed the locations of the enemy with Farsight, then Kelvin had immediately added the information to the map. I adjusted my direction accordingly, making a beeline straight for them.

::I'm about to arrive. How about you two?::

::I'm almost there t— You're already fighting, Melfina?!::

Sera's exclamation prompted me to take a second look at the map. Sure enough, Melfina's marker was smack dab in the middle of a whole bunch of red dots.

::Mhm, I arrived first. Started without you!::

::ARGH! Leave some for me too!::

::Can't make any promises.::

Judging from her voice, Sera seemed to be feeling quite frustrated about having been outdone. *Sera's been getting a bit competitive with her lately. I wonder why.*

::Alex, if we do a good job again, Kel-nii should acknowledge us even more. Let's do our best!::

::Arf!:: Alex replied energetically from my side. Thanks to his Unique Skill, Shadow Travel, my partner was capable of staying inside of and freely traveling between shadows, and was currently hiding in mine.

Seeing as he likes staying within my shadow for long periods of time, maybe it's actually comfortable in there.

Between Alex and me, I was the one with the higher Agility stat. That was why I was effectively carrying him all the way to the battlefield.

Although Melfina still beat me there...

::Rion, according to Kelvin's information, the monsters are apparently Rank B. You should be fine with your current strength, but be careful, okay?::

::Sera's right. I'm not singling you out, but those who are halfway between beginner and veteran have the highest tendency to overestimate their own capabilities and end up getting into trouble.::

::Don't worry, Sera-nee, Mel-nee. I got this! Trust me!::

Having other people worry about me does make me happy, but I wish they'd stop treating me like a child. Efil is only two years older, and they don't do it to her! That said, I do lose hands down in the boobs department...no, this won't do. I'm getting depressed all by myself for a silly reason. That's right, boob size alone doesn't determine a girl's worth!

I'm sure Kelvin is smarter than that. What's more, I'm still going through a growth spurt, I'm drinking my milk every day, and my current lifestyle is far healthier than that of my previous life. So I still have a chance! All right, I've managed to bring my thoughts back under control.

::Grrrr!::

::Yep, we're almost there. They should be coming into sight any moment now::

Alex had already entered a battle-ready stance. I should focus on what I'm doing now too.

When I listened carefully, I caught some sounds coming from the front of the otherwise silent forest. I picked up my speed a bit more and cleared the rest of the distance like a gust of wind.

Suddenly, my view opened up, and I found myself confronted by a huge crowd of monsters. Nellas had said there were generally only giants, but I saw much more variety here, including big lizards and walking trees. There were human voices coming from all the way in the back as well, but I couldn't see them from where I was.

Strewn about the ground here and there were giant birds and bats that had most likely been dispatched by Sera's handiwork. The skies were completely clear, which meant that she had probably taken care of all the flying monsters.

Strangely enough, I also saw some creatures fighting amongst each other, even though they were supposed to be on the same side. *Did they have a falling out?*

"The monsters you see rampaging around are the ones that used to be controlled by the Tamers who're now dead."

"Oh, hi, Mel-nee."

There was my big sister, leisurely walking out from the fray with her awe-inspiring spear in one hand and her blue armor glinting beautifully in the moonlight. Despite having been fighting for quite a while, there wasn't a speck of blood or dust on her.

However, there was a guy dangling from the tip of her spear.

"Who's that? Is he a stray?"

"This guy?"

Melfina lifted her spear higher to give me a better view. *Oh, look, the mysterious guy is being strangled.*

"He is the commander of this group. I think I heard his subordinates call him 'Colonel.' So I went ahead and nabbed him first."

"What?! Already?!"

When I took a better look, I realized the man was indeed wearing rather high-quality clothing. *He looks pretty limp, though. Is he all right?*

::ARRRGH! You beat me to it!::

A loud telepathic cry emanated from farther ahead on the

battlefield. Apparently, Sera had also arrived before me.

“That was Sera-nee, wasn’t it?”

“It’s my win this time,” said Melfina with a smug expression. I had only ever seen her make that face while gorging herself on Efil’s food. Maybe Sera’s rivalry with her wasn’t entirely one-sided after all.

“Aww, I was late to the party...” *Even though I pushed myself pretty hard to get here quickly.*

“Sera’s gone to finish off the stragglers. What do you feel like doing now?”

“I haven’t done anything yet! I’ll go help Sera, I suppose.”

“Then let’s go together. I wouldn’t be able to stop worrying otherw—”

“Gosh! Stop treating me like a child! And what are you going to do with that guy?” *Wouldn’t he get in the way, dangling from her spear like that?*

“Give me a second,” Melfina replied before switching over to the Network. ::Honey, I’ve captured the target. Please Summon Clotho for me.::

::You got it.::

Abruptly, a small magic circle appeared before us, and out popped a small slime.

“Oh, hi there, Clotho,” I said with a small wave.

::That clone will bring the target to my location. I’m able to Summon the Clotho clones anywhere at any time, so just let me know what you need.::

::Thank you, honey.::

Melfina dumped the man onto the slime, which promptly sprouted tentacles to secure him and bounced off towards the village.

“That’s that. Shall we get going? It seems like there’s another force approaching on the heels of this one.”

“Mel-nee, could you leave at least a little bit for me to do?” *Just when am I going to be able to catch up with my sisters?*



“Where are the regular reports? Did something happen?”

Lieutenant General Ulfred of the Mixed Monster Order had, from his position within the main force, dispatched his slaves for scouting. They were supposed to report back periodically to let him know what was going on in the battle, but he had yet to see a single one of them return, despite having waited for quite a while.

Additionally, there was no word from the two colonels that he had sent ahead, either. Normally, they would have shuttled messengers back and forth, riding fast monsters to maintain continuous contact.

“Report! Report!”

“Finally.”

A soldier appeared from the darkness of the forest ahead. He must have been in quite a rush, seeing as he had almost ridden his mount to death. Ulfred shook his head with disapproval at the sight.

“L-Lieutenant General, terrible news!”

“Calm down. What, did the Beast King show up?”

“It wasn’t Gaun! Enemies showed up before we even reached the Village of the Elves! Regiment Four has been annihilated, and Colonel Kazena has been captured!”

“What?! If not Gaun, where is the enemy army from? Toraj?! Deramis?!”

“Sir, it’s not an army but a party of adventurers! We’ve confirmed three females and one shadow wolf, affiliations unknown! All of them are so powerful that our Rank B monsters can’t do a thing against them! Furthermore, undetectable attacks that seem like arrows are continuously raining from above, making it impossible to advance!”

“What the hell?! It’s only a few people?!”

Ulfred’s mind raced. *This expeditionary force was formed to counter the Beast King, and yet we’re being decimated in a matter of minutes?! Did we underestimate things, or are these adventurers that much stronger than the ruler of Gaun?!*

“Lieutenant General! Colonel Dill’s Fifth Regiment is continuing to engage the enemy, but it’s only a matter of time before their formation collapses. Please give us your orders!”

“Shit! All right, it’s time for you to get a move on, Gigant Lord! Get your lazy ass up!”

The humongous figure that had been kneeling behind Ulfred slowly rose. At its full height, it towered far above the canopy of trees.

“So, this is the secret weapon I’ve heard so much about!”

“Doesn’t matter who these adventurers are, there’s no winning against a Rank S monster! Bring Gigant Lord back to the front with you and tell Dill to restructure his formation with this thing at the center and the other monsters as backup! You, are you listening?!”

Of all things, the soldier was suddenly looking off in another direction. Seeing that, Ulfred couldn’t help but snap at him.

But the man didn’t seem to have heard a word. Instead, he lifted a trembling hand and pointed. “L-Lieutenant General...”

Foreboding welled up like a geyser inside of Ulfred. *No way, that can’t be. It’s too fast. And this is the Second Regiment. It’s our main force!* Yet although his mind was in complete denial, he could not help but look.

“Dear oh dear, I seem to have already broken through to the other side of the force. Oh well, I’m sure Sera will take care of the rest.”

“Look, look! That giant’s so big, Mel-nee! It’s like something

straight out of a manga!”

There before Ulfred’s eyes were two girls who bore the air of a pair of sisters out for a stroll through town. “You’ve got to be shitting me. They really *are* just girls!”

Ulfred’s bewilderment was quite understandable. After all, Rion was nearly a child, and even Melfina looked well under twenty. Going by appearances alone, neither of them seemed capable of obliterating Trycen’s famed Mixed Monster Order.

“S-S-Spare me!” the messenger stuttered. He had fallen into such a fear upon seeing the girls that Ulfred couldn’t help but wonder what he had actually witnessed in the forest.

“Thank you for guiding us here,” Melfina said with an angelic smile. “It saved us the effort of having to look around ourselves.”

“Mel-nee, you’re so smart! Following him was the right choice after all!”

“You...*purposely* let him go and tailed him?!”

The monster that the messenger had just about ridden to death was a ground bird — a creature that, in exchange for having retrogressed wings incapable of flight, could run faster than the swiftest horse. The fact that the girls had the Agility to track a ground bird being pushed beyond its limits like it was nothing led Ulfred to throw away any hesitation or preconceptions.

“Gigant Lord, fight them like you’re taking revenge for your kin! Don’t let your guard down for a second!”

The lieutenant general whipped the monster to rile it up. Sure enough, it roared in blind rage and charged forward, each stomp of its foot causing the earth to shake.



“The closer it gets, the bigger it looks. It’s almost as tall as the walls that Kel-nii makes, isn’t it?”

Melfina brought a hand to her chin, indicating that she was thinking about something. “We *could* just fight it, but...”

“We’re *not* going to fight it?” Rion asked in puzzlement, her sword already drawn.

Melfina narrowed her eyes slightly, then switched to communicating through the Network.

::Rion, try to defeat this monster with Alex alone.::

::What, really?::

::The opponents that you’ve fought so far haven’t been enough to push you to your limits. Being able to win against those weaker than you doesn’t mean anything and doesn’t help you to grow. You want to be recognized by your brother as a true adventurer, don’t you?::

::That’s...well, I do.::

::By defeating this monster, you'll be proving that you're able to stand on your own. As for treating you like a child...I'll do my best to tone it down.::

::So, you're not going to stop entirely?::

In spite of how they treated her, the members of Kelvin's party did understand how strong Rion was. They were, however, worried about whether or not she could tap into all that strength in the heat of the moment. Part of those misgivings were likely due to her being seen as part of the "little sister group" along with Ruka. This tendency was true of all their acquaintances, but especially more so among the core party members.

::That monster is most likely Rank S. You think you can do it?::

::I...I do. I won't let all that sword training from Gramps and the magic training I've been receiving from Kel-nii these past few days go to waste!::

As a Hero, Rion was indeed far more powerful than her level would indicate. In addition to the extra stats from level-ups, she possessed the same Nerves of Steel skill that Kelvin himself had, which granted her the mental fortitude to remain calm in all situations — with the sole exception being when her physical attributes were commented on — and deal with things in a cool-headed manner.

Above all, she had a burning desire to protect her newfound family. This simple and straightforward reason had gotten her through all the tough training that her mentors had thrown her way.

::I know how hard you've been working. Don't worry, if you're able to use everything that you've learned so far, you'll certainly win.::

Melfina's quiet voice was reassuring. The fact that this sister of hers — who Rion respected as much as she did Kelvin — placed so much faith in her helped to dispel any last shred of hesitation that had been in the younger girl's heart.

::Thank you! Well then, here goes!::

A beat after the giant had started its charge, Rion dashed forward.



Ulfred could hardly believe his eyes. *Only one of them?! These fucking bitches are looking down on us!*

He could hardly be faulted for his disbelief, as all he saw was a single teenage girl wearing light armor attempting to take on a Rank S monster by herself. The sword in her hand did look very well-tempered, but it could only be Rank B at best. It might have been sufficient for what she had faced so far, but Gigant Lord had skin even harder than steel.

The instant her sword lands, the blade is going to snap clean off! Curse your own recklessness once your beloved weapon is destroyed!

Ulfred whipped the giant again. With a loud roar, it changed direction to make a beeline for Rion. Its grey body shot forward like a bullet, reaching speeds that one could hardly imagine from such a hulking figure.

“Go, Gigant Lord!”

“Here I go!” the girl called back before abruptly vanishing from sight.

Ulfred’s eyes widened with shock. *What the hell?! Where’d she go?!*

He couldn’t have known that by this point, Rion’s Agility stat had already surpassed that of Sera and Melfina. However, her stamina was still limited, so she would usually only utilize a portion of that speed in order to pace herself. For this battle, however, her key to victory lay in a swift resolution. As such, she had pushed herself to her maximum speed in the blink of an eye.

Even so, Gigant Lord was capable of following her movements. Without slowing down, the monster unleashed a punch to the front and slightly to the right, precisely where Rion was positioned. The instant its fist made contact with the ground, a massive crater appeared, with the nearby trees collapsing in a wave of crumbling dirt. The scale of the damage was like night and day compared to what Miyabi’s Rank A Grave Death Ogre could do. If anyone was to fly up into the sky and glance down, it would look as if a bald spot had suddenly appeared within the sea of green.

“Phew, that’s quite a powerful attack!”

“What?! Y-You *dodged* that?!”

When Ulfred saw Rion after her exclamation of wonder, he couldn’t believe his eyes. Not only had the girl dodged Gigant Lord’s attack, but she had even gotten onto its outstretched arm and climbed up to its shoulder.

“Alex!”

A wolf leaped out from her shadow. The hour was late, and there was an abundance of shadows everywhere thanks to the dimly glowing moon.

The beast attacked with his sharp claws and teeth, and the giant attempted to fight back by slapping its own body with its palms. But it was to no avail, as its assailant had little trouble dodging by simply diving into a different shadow each time.



Slash! Slash! Slash!

Aw, it’s not very deep, Rion noted internally, seeing as Alex had not yet managed to draw blood. *The skin is thicker than expected. In that case...*

Taking advantage of the giant’s occupation with the wolf, Rion

clambered up to its head in the blink of an eye. She lifted her sword high and brought it down onto the monster's skull with all her might.

Crack!

The blade snapped off. Just as Ulfred had predicted, the durability of the weapon had been insufficient. This sword — which had been named “Strengthened Mithril Sword” — was the very blade that Kelvin had once seized from Cashel and then re-tempered. Clearly, it hadn't been the best choice against Gigant Lord.

Rion's attack prompted the giant to shift its focus onto her.

“Hah! Now you're screwed, bitch!” screamed Ulfred.

“Y-Yeah, get her!”

The sight of Rion's sword breaking had prompted the lieutenant general and his subordinate to let out cheers. Melfina looked at them with pitying eyes.

These two have become so preoccupied with the fight that they've completely forgotten about me, haven't they? While Rion is taking care of the giant, you two have let your guards down entirely. I can just...no, never mind. It won't be conducive to her education if I do it for her.

The two men had yet to notice the huge wall of ice that now stood behind them. Melfina had erected it secretly just in case they ran, but she was starting to think it had been a wasted effort. *Anyway, whoever said that Rion has only one sword?*

The Hero continued to dodge Gigant Lord's attacks, both of her hands now free thanks to the loss of her sword. At times, she would use Sky Walk to change her trajectory in midair. On other occasions, she would climb right across the monster's body.

Alex also got in his own attacks whenever he saw an opening, but the giant ignored the wolf completely, having determined it to be unworthy of its attention.

At this rate, things are going to get bad, Rion thought. If I take a single hit, that'll be the end of me. I'm so glad I listened to Kelvin's advice to pick up Nerves of Steel.

::Alex, Clotho, match my timing!::

A tiny Clotho clone popped out from beneath her armguard. Then it spat out three swords from Storage: two towards Rion's hands, and one at the last shadow that Alex had jumped into.

“Awooo!” Alex howled, leaping out of the darkness. He caught the sword in his mouth in midair, then landed on the giant's left arm.

All three blades were emanating highly unusual auras.

“Dual Wield?! But that's a skill only Heroes can possess!”

“Really? I saw it listed in the Skills tab like any other skill, so I didn't give it much thought. And we're not dual-wielding.”

Rion and Alex both struck a pose with their swords.

“Human-Wolf Union, Triple Wield! Thunderclap Edge!”

As Melfina nodded approvingly at the sight with a satisfied smile on her face, there was suddenly a blinding flash of light and a roaring sound like the crashing of thunder. It was so unexpected that Ulfred and his subordinate immediately cowered, inadvertently covering their faces. The giant was also forced to close its eyes for a moment.

The cause of the sudden chaos had been Thunderclap Edge, a Rank A Red Magic spell that Rion had come up with while referencing Kelvin's Vortex Edge. What she had achieved was the harnessing of the frightening power of nature itself in the form of a blade.

It had been the sword in her right hand, Demon Sword Caladbolg, that Rion had enchanted with the spell. A closer look would reveal that there were tiny flickers of lightning licking across every inch of the metal.

"We're about to get serious now, Mr. Giant."

She once again disappeared. This time, both Ulfred *and* the giant — having closed its eyes — lost sight of her. The only one present who could tell where she'd gone was Melfina.

Rion pushed herself to move as fast as she could, once again running up Gigant Lord's arm in a flash. But this time she had plunged a sword deep into the monster's skin and was dragging the weapon along with her as she ran, cutting the flesh wide open as she moved.



The skin, which seemed as hard as an iron wall mere moments before, parted like a chopstick cutting through tofu. Vestigial sparks of lightning ran from the wound, and the air was filled with the dreadful smell of burning flesh. Demon Sword Caladbolg had been enchanted with the amplification of lightning. The sword was capable of emitting electricity on its own, but its destructive power would increase with the use of magic. And when the magic imbuing it was *lightning magic*, that increase would be bolstered exponentially.

“ROOOAARRRRRRRR!”

Even Gigant Lord could not help screaming. Having been essentially wearing a natural full-body suit of armor for its entire life, this was the first time it had ever suffered an injury, much less one so severe.

As soon as she reached the top of the creature’s head, Rion showered it with attacks. It was a repeat of the scene with the Strengthened Mithril Sword, but this time performed with two swords of overwhelmingly higher rank. The slashes, which were made faster than the eye could see, quickly stained the monster’s face red.

During this time, Alex had been attacking from the giant’s blind spots with the sword in its teeth. Every once in a while, the purple blade reflected the light of the moon and glinted with a terrible beauty. Like a phantom, the shadow wolf appeared and disappeared here and there, leaving cuts all over the humongous body of its foe. With each slice, the weapon took more and more of the giant’s blood with it.

Alex’s sword, which had the same sharpness as Demon Sword Caladbolg, was called Lethal Opiate Sword. Belying its alluring appearance, it possessed a truly ghastly ability: with one slice, it would rob the victim of their sense of taste. With the second slice, the target’s sense of smell would be gone. From there followed the loss of sight, hearing, and finally, touch. This ability was devastatingly effective against not only humans but also large monsters with high Endurance and significant HP pools.

Gigant Lord had already received more than five slashes. In other words, it was now without any of its senses.

Rion and Alex were carefully observing the beast’s movements and attacking with perfect coordination. To the untrained eye, it might have looked like they were each doing their own things, but they were actually weaving in feints and surprise attacks to create opportunities for each other, with each helping to maximize the other’s performance. This was the consummate illustration of what triple-wielding truly meant.

Crash!

Having completely lost its orientation, Gigant Lord finally crumpled to its knees. The fight was already deci—

“GIGANT LORD! HURRY UP AND FUCKING TRANSFORM ALREADY!”

“What?”

Ulfred's shout made Rion pause briefly in surprise. Alex, seemingly having sensed the change, ran back a distance from the giant.

“ROOOAAAARRRRRR!”

As the monster roared at the top of its lungs, its wounds turned bright red. And it was not the color of blood.

“So, this is its true form.”

“Uh, Mel-nee, this isn't the time to be calmly appreciating the sight. It's actually getting pretty hot here!”

“It's lost its sense of hearing too, so I doubt this is in reaction to that man's order. The monster must have felt that its life was in danger, and its instincts kicked in.”

Crimson flames burst from all of the giant's wounds, burning as hot as magma. The heat was so fierce that it was even affecting the wall of ice Melfina had created. When the monster stood back up, it was clear that the transformation had somehow healed the damage it had suffered.

“HAHAHA! You think it would be ranked S just for being tough and strong? This is Gigant Lord's true power! Now not even your bones will remain! Get her, Gigant Furnace Lord! Incinerate them with your hellish fla—”

“Well, it's not like this changes anything. And this creature's flames are weaker than Efil-nee's, to be honest.”

With a synchronized breath, Rion and Alex resumed their assault. It didn't matter that the monster's attacks had powered up, as it was *speed* that it was lacking. It hadn't been able to land any attacks on its two assailants before, and was still unable to do so now. In other words, it was one-sidedly taking a beating yet again. Even more unfortunately for it, Rion and Alex were used to facing Efil's flames and had been taught how to handle them.

To sum it up...well, the situation simply played out the same way as before.

BOOM!

“WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING, GIGANT FURNACE LORD?! YOU CAN'T JUST FALL OVER!” Ulfred screamed.

“Easy for you to say, but do you have any idea how tough it is being without all five of your senses?” Melfina replied wryly. “And looks like the flames are dying down too.”

“Ro...aaa...arr...”

Soon enough, all of the giant's flames had disappeared. This time, it looked well and truly defeated.

"H-How could this happen? How could the Mixed Monster Order...but we're Trycenian! We can't lose..." Ulfred sank to the ground, clearly having lost the will to fight. Every so often, he would mumble, "How can I explain this to Tristan-sama..." in a voice filled with despair.

"Wonderful job! You did well," Melfina said to Rion.

The girl laughed bashfully. "You think Kel-nii will acknowledge me now?"

"Mhm, of course he will."

Rion leaped into Melfina's arms and closed her eyes blissfully as the goddess patted her head.

Apparently, the younger girl had yet to realize how much these mannerisms of hers contributed to everyone treating her like a child.



"Rion-sama appears to have won her battle without any mishaps."

"She sure has grown strong in such a short time."

Both Efil and I had been keeping an eye on our little Hero's fight with Farsight. Several times, I felt a powerful compulsion to lend a helping hand, but I managed to control myself. *Your big brother has faith in you, Rion!*

Still, to think she's already become capable of defeating a Rank S monster on her own. Now we've got to acknowledge her as a full member of the party and hold back on treating her like a child. Well...we'll try our best, anyway. Can't promise much.

"Is it safe to say that the enemy has been annihilated?"

"I mean, I don't sense any— EFIL!"

"What?!"

My Danger Detection suddenly went off like an explosion inside my head. Before I even had time to think about it, I'd instinctively reformed part of the tower into a shield and fortified our defenses against the direction the warning was coming from.

That very moment, some sort of magic attack clashed into my shield, and the two canceled each other out. My shield was quite literally blasted to dust.

"Whaaat? I thought I'd finished you off, but you're not dead."

"Shoot first and ask questions later, is it? That was quite the greeting."

Five people were floating in the air, high off the ground, around the same height as our tower.

Damn, they must have been hiding themselves using a spell. I don't have Magic Detection, and Sera's out in the field.

The one who had spoken was a man with eerily perfect facial features, and the others were all women wearing light armor with a questionable amount of exposure.

“Master...” Efil murmured as she drew her bow.

“Hm? Hmmm? Oh, look, it’s my lucky day!” The man suddenly broke out into a little jig.

Is it just me, or are his appearance and mannerisms really at odds with each other?

“Hehe...hehehe...I’ve seen quite a few elves before, but you, you’re the very best! I’ve taken a liking to you at first sight!”

“Hey, dude...”

“Oh, yes, you I like. I like you a lot!” the man gushed, completely ignoring me. I was feeling a bit annoyed, but then he said something even more reprehensible. “All right, then. You’ll be my slave!”

“No, thanks.”

“Wait, what?! You haven’t fallen for my looks? Seriously?!”

This guy...is not acting. He actually seems surprised from the very bottom of his heart. And it looks like Efil is tired of his shit. Hold on a minute, this guy —

“What an odd one you are. What’s so good about that background character beside you anyway? But don’t worry! I’ll save you!” He puffed out his chest and brought one hand up to his chin, striking a pretentious pose. “Now you shall fall f—”

With a *whoosh*, the Radiance Lance that I’d shot grazed past the man’s cheek.

“C’mon, what was that for?”

“You were just about to cast Charm Eye on Efil, weren’t you?”

According to Analyze Eye, this man possessed the Unique Skill Charm Eye, which he had been preparing to use on my companion. *The nerve of this fucking guy.*

“As I said, so what? What, you think *you* can fight me?” he replied with a belittling snort.

I was one to laugh most things off, but this was something even I couldn’t ignore. Although trite, I had to say what needed to be said.

“Don’t you dare lay a hand on my woman.”

The man’s jaw dropped open in an exaggerated expression of surprise. “Oh, uuuggh. It’s my first time hearing someone say something so cheesy in real life! Aren’t you mortified? Hey, *are* you mortified?”

“Efil, head for the wall. I’ll be deconstructing this arrow tower in a moment.”

“Hellooooo! You ignoring me now?”

“Understood, Master. Take care of yourself!”

Efil promptly disappeared, having activated Covert Action. I

assumed that she was immediately making her way down to the ground.

“Whaaat? Where did Efil-chan go?”

“Just...shut up already, you.”

“No, *you* shut up. I don’t have business with you, it’s Efil-ch—”

“*Shut up.*”

With a swing of my right hand, the man and his companions were blown away by a powerful gust of wind, sending them in the general direction of Trycen. As my anger had completely boiled over, even I wasn’t sure how far they had gone. At the very least, it was better than fighting them close to the village. We couldn’t very well have casualties, not after coming this far.

The group had been using the Green Magic spell Fly to hover. This was a spell that enabled someone to move as if they had wings, but those who did not also possess the Flight skill were easily susceptible to sudden winds not under their control.

As such, all I’d had to do was direct a blast of wind powerful enough to blow a dragon away against the intruders.

“Fly. Sonic Acceleration.”

I cast the same spell that my opponents were using on myself, then boosted my speed on top of it. After all, I had to catch up to them.

With a light tap, I leaped off of the tower, then turned to dismantle it while floating in midair. Adamantite Rampart lost its form and became converted into something more useful for the immediate situation.

“Obsidian Edge, Four — complete!”

The material that had composed the arrow tower was compressed into four swords the length of my body. I further buffed each of them with additional spells.

“There they are.”

With Farsight, I managed to locate my opponents, who were still in the middle of being blown away. Thanks to there being two people with wings in my party, I had already mastered the usage of Fly long ago without picking up the Flight skill myself, so I could close the distance in the blink of an eye.

I sped through the empty sky so fast that I left sonic booms in my wake. Considering how high up I was, I didn’t have to worry about affecting anything on the ground, so I rushed forward at top speed, charged up with the exhilaration of not having to hold back.

“Hey, there.”

The man had managed to regain his balance first and was just about to regain full control of himself. The same could not be said for his subordinates. I stopped abruptly in front of the leader to let him

take the full brunt of my shockwave, but it didn't seem to affect him at all. A closer look revealed that he had surrounded himself with some sort of barrier.

“Pheeew...you're pretty good for a background character, hm?”

“Who the fuck you calling a *background* character?” *How rude. You know how many times I've been praised by my female companions for my wonderful smile while in battle?*

“All right, you diiiiid surprise me a little, making such a fool of the protagonist of this story. But I sure am glad I asked Tristan for the opportunity to come here. It must be fate that's brought Efil-chan to me!”

“Protagonist, huh. You fancy yourself the main character of a novel or something?”

“Ahahaha, I'm not *fancying* myself one, I *am* one! Not that I expect a mere peon like you to understand it.”

“You're a transmigrator, aren't you?”

“Whaaat? How'd you know?”

I knew it. Him coming from the modern world explains his unnatural word choices and strange behavior.

“Well, no matter. Since I'm generous and have a biiiiiig heart, I'll introduce myself! I am — ”

Clive Teraaze (18 y/o, Male, Human, Green Mage)

Level: 91

Title: General of the Magic Knight Order

HP: 847/847

MP: 2,050/2,400 (+1,600)

Strength: 234

Endurance: 263

Agility: 355

Magic: 802

Luck: 488

Skills: Charm Eye (Unique Skill), Green Magic (Rank S), Analyze Eye (Rank A), Magic Detection (Rank A), Concealment (Rank A), Nerves of Steel (Rank A), Spirit (Rank S), Conversation (Rank B), Storage (Rank B), Double Growth Rate, Double Skill Points

“General Clive Teraaze of the Trycenian Magic Knight Order, right?” *If he's a Green Mage, then he'll be using either wind or earth magic, or maybe both. That first preemptive strike was likely wind magic. The other skills he possesses also tend towards a flexible fighting style.*

“How did you know? Well, I'm famous, so I guess it's not too surprising.”

Did he not even consider the possibility that I peeked at his Status

screen simply because he's got Concealment at Rank A? And what's more...
"You changed your appearance during your transmigration, didn't you?"

"Whatever could you be talking about?"

"Hah! As if an unnaturally perfect face like that comes along by chance." *Dude, you've taken it so far that it looks creepy instead. If Touya is the ultimate example of a natural hunk, you're the ultimate example of a plastic surgery project.*

"Are you a transmigrator toooo?"

"All this is common knowledge. More importantly, are you sure about being so laid back? You're already within my attack range."

While speaking, I shot three Obsidian Edges at Clive at such incredible speed that they seemed guaranteed to open three huge holes in his body. However, they were stopped effortlessly by the barrier surrounding him, giving off a grinding noise and showers of sparks at the points of contact.

"Well, that was quite sudden."

"You started it."

"But it's useless, of course. My Helix Barrier can block everything, be it physical or magical. Normally, it completely shreds whatever it comes into contact with, though. Looks like those swords of yours are pretty tough!"

I had of course checked out Clive's barrier while taking a look at his Status a few moments before. As it turned out, the shield was made up of wind rotating rapidly in a helical shape so as to redirect the force of any incoming attacks. He wasn't lying when he said that anything coming into contact with it would normally be shredded to ribbons.

"Then how about this?"

"Where'd you g— Aha! Above!"

I had flown around him in a split second and plunged the last Obsidian Edge in my hand straight downwards.

"As I said, it's useless. Helix Barrier protects me from every angle. It has nooo blind spots."

Unfortunately, he was right. My sword was stopped by the barrier a second time. I kept up the assault for a while longer but to no avail.
Continuing at this point would just be wasting magic.

"Return."

All the Obsidian Edges flew back to my side, floating motionlessly in midair. *He's having no trouble keeping up with my speed. Is he using Magic Detection to track the traces of my magic? His character aside, it looks like he actually has a good amount of battle experience under his belt.*

"Woow, what a face. Have you suddenly gone mad?"

“Mm? Oh, nah, it’s just that I haven’t felt this excited in a while. This is getting fun, isn’t it?” *I’m grinning again, aren’t I?*

“That’s rather disgusting. Please die quickly.”

Danger Detection suddenly reacted to threats coming from several directions at once. Thanks to Parallel Processing, I identified each incoming attack simultaneously and precisely intercepted them with a cast of Wind Shot.

“Niiice going. But while we’ve been doing this, my little kitties have finally returned.”

True enough, Clive’s four companions were once again hovering behind him.

“These are my favorites. They’re quite strong!”

“They’re all Charmed? You make for a pretty shitty protagonist, you know that?”

The women’s Statuses were all Concealed, but not at a high enough rank to be effective against my Rank S Analyze Eye. Every last one of them had “Charmed” listed in the Passive Effects field.

“Oh, pshh, there are all sorts of protagonists nowadays. And I’m sure these kitties love it. After all, they have the honor of serving such a stunningly handsome hunk.”

“What an egotistical delusion.”

“A delusion? Not at all! I’m sure Efil-chan will also come to understand everything great about me. Especially once we get into bed together!”

“Right. Looks like I’ll have to properly kill you off.”

“I wish you wouldn’t say things like that with such an eerie smile on your face, you know? It seriously gives me goosebumps! But you *do* look composed. You realize it’s now five against one, right? As they say, strength in numbers and all that.”

“Thanks for the concern, but I’m probably not as outnumbered as you think.”

An explosion went off in the distance, after which a crimson sparkle tore through the inky night, making straight for Clive.

“What?!”

My opponent looked slightly flustered, but Magic Detection had apparently served him well. He managed to dodge the attack by a hair’s breadth, but it still collided with his barrier.

The attack was Efil’s Blaze Arrow, a move she had devised that was focused on penetration. And sure enough, it successfully pierced Clive’s shield and destroyed it.

“Shit, my Helix Bar—”

“You really shouldn’t look away during a fight.”

“Wh—?!”

Four of the golems I had originally stationed around the forest had

suddenly appeared around me. These were the latest and newest models, jointly developed by Sera and me. For their appearance, we had used Gerard's armor as a reference and made it look even fancier.

In short, they appeared to be knights. Knights who were now hovering in the air, each with an Obsidian Edge of their own in hand.

"What was that about strength in numbers again?"



Clive and I floated there facing each other, his female companions behind him and my Obsidian Edge-equipped golems behind me. He was in a state of extreme bewilderment, his composure from before no longer anywhere to be seen. Part of that was clearly his disbelief that the barrier he had placed so much faith in had actually been destroyed. Another reason was the sudden appearance of my golems.

"Are...those really golems?"

"A bit modified, but yeah, they sure are."



This might be a bit long, but allow me to explain.

The base of my golems did indeed come from the spell Adamantite Guardian, but their appearance had been completely overhauled. During the fight with the Heroes, these golems had looked like large, crude suits of metal. Now, however, I had managed to compact them to the size of an average human adult, as if they were real knights clad in proper armor. In inverse proportion to their change in height, their capabilities had been greatly bolstered.

First, I would like to bring attention to the Wind Jail Gems that had been embedded into their bodies. When filled with magic, these stones had the ability to generate gusts of wind more than powerful enough to keep their ridiculously heavy forms floating in the air. These items were actually quite expensive, being Rank A and all, but fortunately, I had Clotho by my side.

My buddy possessed a skill, Metalicize, which allowed it to convert any part of its body into any metal substance at will, with the sole requirement being that it had to have touched a sample of the target material before. Even a Rank S substance could be reproduced anytime, anywhere, and in any quantity desired.

All along the way, I'd had Clotho touch everything notable that we came across in stores and on our travels, so as to expand its database for Metalicize. This collection naturally included Wind Jail Gems — something we had discovered within the Dragon Sea Cave while training the Heroes. Clotho had "touched" it while picking up all the available material samples and throwing them into Storage.

It was in combination with another skill, Division, that the true worth of Metalicize became evident. The thing was, my slime buddy's body had grown to rather enormous proportions, with the majority of its bulk being packed away in Storage.

On the flip side, this meant Clotho had plenty of extra mass that it did not need, and it could change those spare body parts into whatever metallic substance it wanted, and detach them completely from its main form. In other words, it could produce a near-limitless number of gems and ores. In addition to supplying the stones for the golems, this partner of mine had been a huge contributor to my smithing endeavors from the start.

The second characteristic of my golems was that they possessed actual skills. Unlike the ones that naturally appeared out in the world, golems created with Green Magic did not normally have this advantage and would therefore be restricted to fighting merely with whatever stats they had been granted at the start. Give one a sword and it would simply swing the weapon around with brute force.

Then the idea of having golems possessed by souls came to me.

Sera knew the Rank A Black Magic spell Spirit Control, which could make ghost-like monsters possess inanimate hosts like corpses and suits of armor. The souls possessing my golems would be capable of using whatever skills they already owned. High-tier souls could be used for this process, but according to Sera, she was “bad with spells for controlling people and things!” I suspected her powers probably came with certain restrictions, just as I faced limitations with Summoning.

Mind Integration could only be cast on souls that were friendly to Sera and willing to cooperate. Therefore, Rion got involved as she could use her Companionship skill to strike up a rapport with and convince any souls who were willing to listen. But the only way she could communicate with them was with the help of Melfina's interpretation. Sera, Rion, and Melfina standing together with a ghost and negotiating with it — without saying a single word out loud — had made for a truly surreal scene indeed.

After quite a bit of searching for intelligent spirits who seemed like a good match for golems, we eventually settled on battle ghosts, which were, as the name suggested, spirits who possessed weapons left behind in dungeons, manipulating and fighting intruders with them.

Taking care to avoid a battle, we approached them one by one to negotiate. Luckily, their species considered it an enormous honor to be able to serve an archdemon, and the talks went as smoothly as one could hope for.

The final four spirits we had brought on board were now

possessing the golems that were currently at my side. They were technically under Sera's command, and would grow stronger the more enemies they defeated. Even if the golems they possessed were destroyed, the spirits themselves would not suffer any harm — we had already tested and confirmed that beforehand. Although their stats were locked to match the golem's stats, their skills could still rank up as usual, which was a huge bonus. And Sera's subordinates were technically also my subordinates, if the way my Experience Sharing skill affected them was anything to go by.

I was actually nursing a secret dream of establishing an army of golems with these four at the top, but we'll leave that for another day. This explanation has taken quite a bit of time already, so let's return to the scene.



"Hmm..."

As a Green Mage, Clive was probably also deeply knowledgeable about golems. Therefore, although I had hidden their Statuses with Concealment, he knew enough to be wary of them. *He's adopting a calm tone, but what's he actually thinking?*

"Well, whatever. Kitties, take care of those good-for-nothing dolls. I'll take care of the annoying talking obstacle myself."

"Golems, let them know your superiority. Oh, but don't kill the women, all right? We have to dispel the Charm on them afterwards. I'll crush this self-proclaimed protagonist on my own."

The female knights drew their blades as my golems brought their own swords before their faces in the way that knights do.

"After I defeat you and your puppets, I've got to go pick Efil-chan up."

"Don't you speak her name again with that disgusting voice of yours. You're defiling it." Both of us were smiling and emanating auras of rage at the same time.

"Go!"

"Go!"

Our simultaneous orders prompted the female knights and golems to leap into action. The former scattered into different directions with Fly, and the latter gave chase by expelling air that was generated by their Wind Jail Gems like jet engines. Several seconds later, the sound of weapons clashing could be heard all around us.

"You suuure about letting them do their own thing? They might be different, but *are* just golems at the end of the day. Those kitties of mine are trusted retainers. They're pretty strong, I'll have you know."

"Trusted" retainers, hah. In any case, if he's putting it that way, does that mean his lieutenant general is among the four of them? They all

looked pretty similar stats-wise.

“Instead of worrying about other people, why not worry about yourself first, you wannabe protagonist?”

“I see...” Clive brushed his bangs back in an affected manner. “Looks like you need some punishing. Don’t worry; I’m gentle and kind!”

He produced a pure white staff out of nowhere and threw an expanding wall of wind at me at high speed.

Did he just pull that out of Storage? In that case...

I asked Clotho to retrieve the Staff of the Evil Sage Tree for me, and promptly cast Vortex Edge on it.

“So, you possess the Storage skill too! That’s a pretty dirty-looking sword you’ve got there. But I do admit that it suits you peeerfectly!”

My opponent was obviously laboring under a small misunderstanding due to how quickly I had cast Vortex Edge. I, however, saw no particular need to set him straight.

Analyze Eye told me the approaching wall was only a Rank B spell that prioritized area of effect rather than destructive power. With the aid of my Sword Mastery skill, I managed to cut through it easily enough with my magic-clad staff. Danger Detection warned me that there was more to the attack, though.

“I’ll give you the honor of being crushed by me personally!”

Just on the other side of the wall and charging through the very tear that I had made was Clive himself, enveloped by a fresh cast of Helix Barrier. *You plan on crushing me to death with that? You sure are putting a lot of trust in that barrier of yours.*

I engaged Clive’s Helix Barrier with my Vortex Edge.

“Ahahaha! If you’re thinking my barrier can be broken again just because it’s been done once, I have bad news for you! It won’t work anymore now that I’m equipped with this staff: Shion!”

“Goddammit.”

Vortex Edge was holding, but Staff of the Evil Sage Tree was starting to creak under the pressure of his spell. Clive’s words were not just a bluff. His barrier had indeed become significantly more powerful and sturdier than before.

“Hahaha! My victory is in sight! Efil-chaaan, here I —”

I was sure that I heard the sound of a vein bursting inside my head. “I TOLD YOU NOT TO SPEAK HER NAME, YOU FUCKER!”

In my anger, I poured the maximum amount of magic possible into Vortex Edge, which allowed it to finally pierce Clive’s barrier and slash a deep wound into his cheek. He immediately jerked himself away. Even so, the pain in that brief moment must have been quite unbearable, considering Vortex Edge more or less moved like a chainsaw.

“IT HURRTTTSSS!! IT HURTS SO BADDDDDD!!!”

“Aww, there goes that pretty face of yours. What a pi—”

As my opponent fell to pieces in the midst of the pain, I swung my staff to press my attack. But my strike failed to land.

“Ah, right, it gave out.”

My head cooled down immediately as I looked at the snapped halves of my staff. After the clash against Helix Barrier, the torrent of magic I had imbued it with had been too much for the weapon to withstand. *Thank you for being there for me all this time through thick and thin, partner. You can rest now.*

“How DARE you...to my face...!”

“Sorry, man. I’d planned on giving you a quick death, but this guy here is telling me to prolong your suffering,” I said, entrusting the broken pieces to Clotho.

“What the hell, you feeling *sorry* for your weapon?! Just how much of a creep *are* you?!”

Apparently, seeing someone else explode with anger really *can* calm you down. I still wasn’t going to forgive Clive, but I was capable of dealing with him in a much calmer and colder manner now.

“You don’t think I only have Helix Barrier up my sleeve, do you?! Hah hah! Fine! Since you asked for it, I’ll show you! You’re dead meat now that you’ve made me use my Rank S spell!”

“A Rank S spell, you say? That sounds like fun. I hope it’s stronger than mine.”

This was something that I only heard from Efil later, but apparently my smile at this moment was my very best one to date.



Rank S spells were a sort of crowning achievement for mages. A final destination, if you will. Although acquiring a Rank S spell was merely a matter of collecting enough points for it, those lacking in talent and experience could spend their lives trying and still not manage to obtain a single one. Furthermore, the control required for wielding such a spell was so high that even among those touted as sages, many could not claim true proficiency over the one they had acquired.

The destructive powers of Rank S spells were not up for debate. Each and every one of them could generate a phenomenon on the scale of a natural calamity. One slip of the hand and an entire city could be reduced to rubble.

“HAHAHAHAHAHA! I’LL DICE YOU UP ALONG WITH THIS STUPID FOREST!”

Wind raged in a helical pattern around Clive in a manner similar to his usual barrier. The only difference was in the amount of magic

now whirling around him. My guess was that he had probably expended almost his entire MP bar to cast this spell.

I had hoped to avoid damaging this forest as it's tied to Efil's origins, but...Clotho, give me the new longstaff.

A monochrome black staff that was even taller than me — I was 170 cm — was promptly deposited into my hands. Someone looking on from a distance could even mistake what I had for a spear. And, coincidentally, the color of my new weapon just happened to be in complete contrast to Clive's white Shion.

I swung my longstaff around a few times to see how it felt in my hands.

"What're you doing now?"

"Warm-up exercise."

"The fuck?!"

The same instant Clive raised his voice, an explosion rang out. Efil had fired off another Blaze Arrow from the village's wall. The burning missile zoomed in on our adversary, but for some reason, he showed no intention of moving. It landed a clean hit on his wall of spiraling magic.

"AHA...AHAHAHA!"

Loud laughter emanated from within the burning ball of flame. Eventually, the flames receded, and there stood Clive, completely unharmed. Blaze Arrow had failed to penetrate the new spell he was using.

"It's pointless! This is more than twice as strong as Helix Barrier. I don't know what *that* was, but it won't work on me anymore! And now..."

The barrier is...shrinking?

"It's time to show you the *real* power of my Rank S spell, Tempest Barrier!"

Just as I thought the barrier was shrinking in on itself, the winds began to stretch vertically, reaching for both the sky and ground. This final version of Clive's spell was a gigantic tornado with him right inside the eye, an enormous mixer shredding the heavens and earth. Its powerful suction ripped the forest trees from their roots, mercilessly tearing apart everything that it came into contact with.

"Tempest Barrier is the ultimate spell, combining both attack and defense! You've already tested its defensive ability for yourself. And now it's become a tornado that's aiming straight for you!

Ha...haha...HAHAHA! There's no escape!"

The wall of death was slowly but surely advancing. At the same time, the winds being whipped up caught hold of me, drawing me closer and closer to it with a force far beyond Fly's ability to resist.

"It is a heavy price that you shall pay for having ruined the face of

the protagonist! Die, scum!”

Clive looked extremely gleeful now that he seemed to have the absolute advantage. His life was no longer in jeopardy, and it looked like I was completely trapped. He was already entertaining repulsive thoughts about his designs on Efil and the elves. I could see it in his eyes.

I didn't panic, though. While struggling against the draw of the tornado as best I could, I focused on the tip of my staff.

“Boreas Death Scythe.”

A blade of magic emerged from the tip of my jet black staff, giving it the look of a large, curved blade. This was no longer a simple longstaff, but the very symbol of the Grim Reaper, he who administered death. If Clive's Tempest Barrier was magic spread out to deal destruction to a large area at once, my Boreas Death Scythe was meant to condense magic into the comparatively tiny area of a blade.



I moved my staff just a little, and there was a small distortion in the space at the far end.

“Doesn’t matter what you try. DIE!” Clive screamed as Tempest Barrier’s approach picked up speed.

He’s gotten so worked up that he’s forgotten to use Analyze Eye. Then again, he’s only got that skill at Rank A, so he wouldn’t have gleaned any useful information from it. So...I suppose it’s the same either way.

I knew that he also possessed Magic Detection, but he was either so blinded by his impending victory or had such faith in his magic that he simply couldn’t comprehend the true nature of my spell. It didn’t seem to occur to him that this was something he definitely needed to dodge.

By this time, the tornado was almost in front of my nose. I turned to face it directly and held up my scythe, shouting, “How about you eat your own words?!”

I swung the blade once, horizontally. A flying slash flew along the length of its trajectory, spreading out in a fan-like effect, distorting the very fabric of space where it passed. As expected, Clive made no attempt to evade the blow. Without flinching, he continued his charge, surrounded by the fortress of wind.

Then my attack reached him.

“Damn, it was a bit off. Looks like I still need to practice controlling this.”

“What did y—?”

Tempest Barrier was abruptly dispelled, causing a shockwave that buffeted the entire forest. The slash from Boreas Death Scythe had sliced through Tempest Barrier and Clive’s legs alike. Just above his knees, to be exact.

The attack did not stop there. It continued spreading out wider and wider the farther it went, eventually making contact with the trees and the ground. Everything in its way was cleanly bisected, and it caused the earth to cave in where it passed into the ground. The rapidly expanding area of damage finally stopped near the edge of the forest. The trees that covered the area were in an absolutely appalling state.

“And here I was, aiming at your torso so that it would fly parallel to the ground. Shit, man. How am I going to explain this to Nellasan?”

“M-My legs...MY LEGSSSSS?!”

Clive’s legs thudded onto the ground below. Blood was spilling out from his severed stumps like a tap. If he did not seek medical help immediately, I wouldn’t have to lift a finger and he’d still run out of HP before long. Although I was slightly impressed that he was

managing to maintain Fly in such a state, there was no way I was going to let him go.

“If I do it directly at this distance, I won’t miss, now will I?”

Using the mobility granted by Sonic Acceleration, I moved to hover in front of him. Just as I was about to bring down my scythe...

“Bye.”

“H-Hold on a mo—”

Clive was in no state to care about appearances. His face was all scrunched up and stained with tears as he begged for his life, but the blade of a Grim Reaper could not be stopped once it had been swung. The attack cut through where his shoulder should have been all the way to the far side of his abdomen.

“Wait, what?” *I didn’t feel any feedback. Moreover, I can’t see him anymore.*

The moment my attack should have landed, Clive’s figure had suddenly disappeared.

“That’s enough,” said a voice that I did not recognize.

I reflexively used Presence Sensing to probe my surroundings, then turned to look in the direction it was indicating. There stood a large monster the likes of which I had never seen before, and standing atop its open palm, a man dressed like a noble. I could swear that neither of them had been there a split second before.

Clive was lying limply at the man’s feet, the visible whites of his eyes indicating that he had fainted.

“Did you do that just now?” I asked, directing the point of my scythe towards the mysterious newcomer.

“Please, there’s no need to be on guard against me. I’m not here to fight you,” the man said, raising his hands in a pose of surrender, a decidedly shady-looking half smile on his face. “First, an introduction is in order, I suppose. I’m Tristan Faaze, the general of the Mixed Monster Order. Before you ask, yes, I am the one who arranged the assault on the elven settlement. It’s a pleasure making your acquaintance, really.”

The man finished by removing his feathered hat and bringing it to his chest with a fancy flourish and a bow.

“So *you* are the one who...I’ll deal with you later. First, give me that piece of trash at your feet.”

“I’m afraid I can’t do that. There is still much that I need General Clive to do for me.”

“All right, you asked for it.” I raised my scythe, but Tristan and his monster disappeared and reappeared behind me.

“As I said, I’m not here to fight you.”

“You’re a Summoner.”

“Oh, hey, good call. How can you tell?”

“And that’s not all. That wasn’t just normal Summoning, was it? That monster of yours must have a pretty interesting skill.”

“Haha...hahahahaha. You’re good; you’re very good. That is quite the astounding insight. I’m sure she will be delighted to hear of this.”

“‘She’? Who’s ‘she’?”

“Ah, no, don’t worry about it,” the Trycenian replied before clearing his throat in a blatant effort to change the topic. “If I say that I only came to meet you today, that’d make me seem like a sore loser. So I’ll admit it: it’s our complete and utter loss. And so, we’ll be taking to our heels now. We’re retreating.”

“You think I’ll let you?” I quickly switched to the Network. *Clotho, give me an MP potion.*

“Aha, I see what you’re doing. But we’ll be taking our leave before you have time to recover. I’m sure we will meet again, though.”

All of my opponents abruptly vanished with those words hanging ominously in the air. *Strange, I didn’t see any sort of magic circle.*

But...they’re gone. Doesn’t feel like they went towards the village, either.

I checked the Follower Network. The golems had successfully immobilized the female knights. Sera was largely done on her side. Melfina and Rion were already on their way back.

The battle is over, everyone. The enemy general got away. I’m returning to the village now. Gerard, remain on alert.

::Yes, my king::

::M-Master?! I-I’ll be waiting!::

Did she just stutter? Never mind, I’ll be back soon. I can check on her in person.

After making that brief report, I hurriedly chugged an MP potion. *I guess things don’t always work out perfectly. And why didn’t that Tristan guy attack the village with his Summoning? But before anything else...*

I looked up at the sky, sucked in a deep breath, and shouted, “FUCKKK!”

As my roar of regret reverberated throughout the forest, I swung Boreas Death Scythe upwards, sending an attack that slashed through the clouds in its way. That single attack expended all the magic I’d imbued the weapon with, returning it to its original appearance as a longstaff.

I felt nearly crushed with self-reproach for having let someone in possession of a skill as dangerous as Charm Eye escape. After all the holier-than-thou talk I’d done, it turned out that I was not in full control of my own magic either. And now my companions, or other innocent people, were going to pay the price for it.

If I had landed that first attack with Boreas Death Scythe properly, things wouldn’t have ended this way.

Although that conclusion left a shadow over my heart, there was

nothing to do but fly back to the village. I would think about where to direct this frustration of mine another day.

For now, we had successfully defended the Village of the Elves.

Chapter 4: Feast

The catastrophe that had befallen the eastern edge of the forest was visible even from the Village of the Elves. Its inhabitants watched fearfully as a gigantic tornado that reached far up into the sky had suddenly appeared, then was destroyed just as abruptly.

The shockwave caused by the dispelling of the whirlwind was just strong enough to reach the village, but, thanks to the distance it had traveled, it did not cause any real damage. The tiny bits of trees and debris that had been chewed up and sent flying all along the way, however...that instilled terror in their hearts.

“The...giant tornado is gone. You think the battle is over?”

“How would I know? I may have good eyes, but even I can’t see that far. I mean, you’re an elf too; if you can’t see it, what makes you think I can?”

Currently occupying the wall that surrounded the village were the locals with relatively higher levels and more battle experience. Each of them had a bow in hand and were keeping a wary eye on their surroundings. Fortunately, they hadn’t needed to do anything so far, but there was no telling when and from which direction the enemy might approach. The calamity occurring in the distance did little to calm their nerves.

“Speaking of elves, how crazy was Efil-san’s archery just now? My ears are still ringing!”

“I know, right? It was my first time hearing such a loud sound made by releasing an arrow. I bet *she* can see all the way out there.”

“As an archer myself, I can’t help but admire her. Plus, she’s so pretty!”

The elves were not entirely without hope, as they were accompanied by one of their own brethren who displayed prowess with the bow far beyond what they had ever seen or heard of. In contrast to her sweet appearance, what she released from her dainty hands were missiles of purgatorial fire accompanied by explosive thunder. With her hawk-like eyes that seemed to transcend the concept of distance, she dealt death from incredible range with pinpoint accuracy.

None of the other elves knew for sure whether Efil landed all her shots or not. But that wasn’t so important. What mattered was that every time she let an arrow fly, it instilled a rush of excitement within

them. Again and again, their hearts tightened with bursts of encouragement.

“Efil-san, is the battle over?” Nellas asked, climbing up the stairs to the top of the wall.

Efil, however, seemed slightly out of it, and could only manage a distracted, “Um, Nellas-sama...”

“Your face looks slightly flushed,” noted the Elder before coming to a realization. “I-Is this a side effect of the magic you were using?! Medical team! Come here, hurry! Efil-san is in a state of emergency!”

“Th-That’s not it! I’m fine, really!”

Nellas’s shout, which had been delivered with his face poking out over the ramparts, sent the rest of the village into a flustered buzz.

“Efil-san’s hurt! Someone, anyone who can use White Magic, hurry to the wall!”

“You there, bring out the most potent potion we have in the village storeroom. There’s no time to waste!”

“Leave it to me!”

“E-Everyone! Please calm down; I’m entirely unharmed!”

Thanks to Efil’s convincing — if it could be called that — the hubbub quickly subsided.

“I’m sorry for jumping to conclusions at such a crucial time...”

“Thank you for your concern, Nellas-sama. More importantly, Master’s battle has indeed finished. He’s returning to the village now. The rest of my companions are also on their way.”

“So you mean to say —”

Efil smiled brightly. “Yes. The enemy has been annihilated, and the village has been saved.”

All of the elves on the wall erupted into cheers. Before long, the joy spread to those within the walls, and soon the entire village was bursting with elation.

“Efil-san, thank you so much, thank you so, so much!”

Many an elf approached Efil to give their thanks, some crying big, fat tears, and others simply radiating happiness from head to toe.

Oh dear, this is quite troubling. I’m not the one they should be thanking; the real credit lies with Master and Rion-sama, Efil thought, trying to pull back from the praise. But the fact was, she had contributed immensely to the defending of the village. The rain of her invisible and undetectable arrows had sown terror into the hearts of the enemy and stopped their advance entirely. Consequently, the village had suffered no damage. And furthermore, the figure of her standing up and supporting Kelvin with her bow had greatly encouraged the elves. She was more than deserving of her fair share of praise.

Master’s words just now...that made me so happy...

::‘My woman,’ was it, lass?::

With a *poof*, Efil’s head figuratively exploded with embarrassment. She crumpled to the floor, steam all but rising from the top of her head.

“E-E-Efil-san?! MEDICS!!”

Once again, chaos erupted.

::Wait, she’s already down for the count? Was *that* too much for her?::

Gerard had been standing guard in front of the main gate the entire time. His proximity to the defense wall, however, had enabled him to sense Efil’s strange mood ever since she had descended the arrow tower.

::Gerard, dude, what’re you doing?:: came Kelvin’s voice. ::Aren’t you supposed to focus on staying vigilant?!::

::With how obvious she was acting, my king, how can I not tease her a bit? Ever since she got to the wall, she’s been zoning out here and there. Considering the timing, the reason for that could only have been what you said at the top of the arrow tower, right? ‘Don’t you dare lay a h—’::

::Don’t *you* dare finish that sentence. You’re going to make *me* keel over with embarrassment too::

::Hahaha, all right. Oh, looks like Princess and the rest are almost back::

Far off in the distance, on the other side of the drawbridge, was a cloud of dust rising up from the forest. The culprits were currently charging straight towards the village gate.

“Gerard is in sight! We’re almost at the finish line!”

“Haaaahhh!”

“This time I’m going to win for sure!”

There was Melfina, running as fast as she could, Rion, sprinting with electricity crackling all over her body, and Sera, tearing down the path with Jin Scrimmage applied to her wings. Apparently they were having yet another competition.

::What are you guys up to this time?::

::We’re competing to be the first to get praised by Honey!::

::We’re competing to be the first to get praised by Kel-nii!::

::We’re competing to be the first to get praised by Kelvin!::

::I...I see:: *Uh, and I’m being treated as the goalpost here?* Gerard thought. He wasn’t left to wonder long, though, as his three companions had already rushed past him.

Rion managed to beat the other two by a small margin, then Melfina and Sera crossed the finish line (Gerard) at the exact same time.

“Yayyy! And it’s all thanks to a spell that I thought up on the

spot!”

“Ugh, losing to Mel is one thing, but Rion...”

“Sera, this is where you should be happy about her growth.”

“I suppose so, yeah, you’re right. Congratulations, Rion. I hate to admit it, but you won this time. You get first dibs on telling Kelvin what you did today.”

“Sera-nee, Mel-nee, thank you! I’ll continue working hard in the future too!”

The three of them clasped each other’s hands in friendship.

“Uh, sorry to interrupt what seems like a special moment, but...what is this?” Gerard asked.

“Adolescence.”

“Uh...what?”

The three of them proceeded to explain how enemy morale had plunged after the defeat of Gigant Lord, prompting most of the Trycenians to either turn themselves in or flee.

“We did a sweep of the area just in case, and somewhere along the way we started competing to see who could round up the most stragglers,” Sera said.

“And we ended up with pretty much the same number of soldiers, so we decided to make it a race back to the village,” Melfina added.

“It sure was fun!” Rion chimed in. “Wasn’t it, Alex?”

The wolf showed his face from Rion’s shadow and barked once in agreement.

“I...have very reliable friends, it seems.”

“Oh, yeah, Gerard, we asked Clotho to bring the people we captured back to the village ahead of us. Did they arrive yet?”

“Mhm. The last one got here just now. I honestly don’t think we can fit another one in.”

The enemies who had been brought back were all packed inside of a cage that had been set up in the village square. Although the holding facility had been created with extra space just in case, it was now so full that the prisoners inside were all squished up together.

“Oh, Kel-nii is back!” Rion cried, pointing towards the eastern sky.

Indeed, there was Kelvin’s figure, flying low towards them. He looked a bit exhausted, but otherwise none the worse for wear.

“Hey, guys. Looks like I’m the last one back. Good work out there, everyone.”

“Kel-nii, welcome back! Listen, listen, I defeated this huuuge monster with just Alex!”

Seeing Rion jumping up and down with excitement and pride in such a cute way brought a warm smile to Kelvin’s face.

“Mhm, I was watching. You did great, Rion.”



My gentle patting of Rion's head put her in high spirits. In the background, Sera ground her teeth with regret and Melfina murmured, "My, oh my," while looking on with a smile. I pretended not to see Gerard in my peripheral vision, restlessly itching to take my place.

My companions warmly welcoming me back was quite a common sight at this point. I was deeply thankful for it, and it made me extremely happy. However, the guilt of having let the enemy general get away was not so easily banished. I had made "not overly relying on stats and skills" my creed and repeated this to my companions many times. But in the end, I was the one who had failed to grasp the concept. My heart was filled with regret.

The price for having let Clive go was probably not going to be cheap. Considering what a prideful man he was, there was no telling what cruel and cowardly scheme he might cook up in revenge. Now that he knew my face, not to mention Efil's, chances were high that he would cross the border and come straight for us.

I needed to properly reflect on what had happened, both to avoid a similar outcome in the future and to prevent my companions from being exposed to any further danger.

I don't want to regret anything anymore.

"Regret?" I repeated, whirling around. *Did that voice just come from the depths of my own mind?*

"—nii. I said, Kel-nii! Are you listening?!"

"Oh, uh, sorry, sorry. Yes, of course I'm listening."

"Gosh, you suddenly seemed to zone out or something. So, back to my story. The giant's body went *fwum!* And flames burst..."

Rion's heroic retelling seemed like it was going to last a while. I wasn't sure what that voice I'd heard just now was, but what I needed to do at the moment was give Rion all my attention. That was, after all, my duty as an older brother.



The sun was rising, slowly illuminating the world around us. I passed through the gate of the village with Rion, who was still flushed with excitement, riding on my shoulders.

"Rion did take down the biggest enemy, but I captured the most soldiers," Melfina said as she nibbled on a skewer of what looked like Japanese dumplings, pulled out from who knows where.

Wait, no, I think I know where. Clotho, don't overindulge her. She's gonna get fat.

"If we're talking achievements, then I finished off the most

monsters!” Sera crowed with her characteristic pose of legs spread, arms crossed, and chin lifted in pride.

Uh, why are the two of them just staring at me? Oh! They want to be praised?

“Both of you did an amazing job.”

“I know, right?! So —”

“Uh-uh, it’s still my turn!” Rion said, leaning down from her position above me to rub her cheeks against my hair.

Sera and Melfina stepped back compliantly, looking slightly defeated. *They’d normally be a bit more persistent. What’s with the uncharacteristic sportsmanship today?*

“Your hair’s so smooth, Kel-nii.”

“Really? I think yours is nicer to the touch, though.”

Rion and I fondled each other’s hair. For what it was worth, I did put quite a bit of effort into maintaining my personal presentation. After moving into the mansion, I’d been taking baths every day and loving it. Of course, so did everyone else in my party. *Viva la bathing culture!*

“My king, there’s nothing wrong with flirting, but the elves are going to notice soon.”

“What are you saying? This is normal and respectable bonding between brother and sister.”

“That’s right, Gramps. It’s not like we’re doing anything embarrassing.”

“Oh, right, silly me. But, wait...” Gerard made a slightly confused face...or at least, I thought he did.

What? What’s weird about what we’re doing?

“Honey, I think you’ve been quite influenced by Rion yourself.”

In the time it took us to have this exchange, we found ourselves back at the village square. We had to get quite close before the elves noticed us, distracted as they were by Efil’s collapse.

I happened to meet Nellas’s eyes as he turned around in our direction.

“K-Kelvin-dono!”

“Nellas-san, we’re ba—”

“KELVIN-DONOOOO!” shouted the elf, dashing towards me at full speed.

Is it just me or has his character completely changed since our first meeting? He’s...a pretty clingy elf, isn’t he?

“I’m so, so sorry! Efil-san has collapsed, and we —”

“First of all, please calm down. Efil is totally fine. No, no, get up! Please!”

Hot on the heels of Nellas, who seemed about to prostrate himself in apology, many of the villagers came over to welcome us back

warmly. I heaved a sigh of relief upon seeing that none of them were injured.

I somehow managed to convince the elves that Efil was just very tired. Once they believed me, their apologies were replaced by a deluge of praises and thanks. As the gathered crowd consisted of virtually every member of the village, the decibel count climbed rather high, to put it mildly. But seeing how heartfelt it all was, I couldn't simply tell them to leave us alone.

Efil must have been so overwhelmed having to face this all by herself.

"Truly, how can we ever repay this debt?"

"Nellas-san, I'm sorry, but can you give us a moment? I want to check on the cage."

"Of course, the captured Trycenian soldiers. Never did we dream that Trycen was behind the monster attacks. Ah, there it is. Please take your time."

Right before me was the special cage I'd made with Green Magic. According to information gleaned through the Follower Network, we had captured, from the Mixed Monster Order, a lieutenant general, two colonels, five captains, and numerous Tamers, and from the Magic Knight Order, one lieutenant general and three colonels.

Very conveniently, all of the ranked soldiers wore medals denoting those ranks on their collars. It made the confirmation process quite easy.

According to the breakdown, Clive had brought all of the strongest members of his order along as bodyguards. He had called them his "trusted retainers," after all. Consequently, we now had in our custody a significant portion of his army's fighting strength.

"E-Eeek!"

Many of the captured prisoners shrieked and tried to press themselves back at our approach. Or to be more specific, it wasn't so much "our" approach as it was Sera, Melfina, and Rion's.

"Well, that was uncalled for. So rude!" Sera exclaimed in a slight huff.

Having watched a good part of the battle, I found myself empathizing a bit with the soldiers. After all, what they had witnessed were unidentifiable enemies rushing straight at them while mowing down a horde of vicious and fiendish Rank B monsters as if pushing past paper scraps. The fact that they appeared to be two cute teenage girls and a stunningly beautiful young woman only made it worse.

During the latter part of the battle, the Trycenian chain of command had broken down due to the absence of officers, leaving the soldiers no choice but to turn and run. I wouldn't have been surprised if a lot of them returned home with severe mental trauma.

"Hup! Hey there, don't be afraid. We don't bite!"

“S-She’s coming! Save us!”

Rion had jumped off my shoulder, done a front flip in midair, and landed right in front of the cage. She approached, waving her hands and smiling brightly, but the end result was the same as Sera’s.

“As a girl, getting that kind of reaction is pretty hurtful, you know?”

“Come on, leave the poor men be. And it’s not even them that I have business with.”

I directed my gaze towards the four women sitting with their arms around their knees. These women, who had been Clive’s subordinates in the Magic Knight Order, all had a blank emptiness in their eyes. Unlike the soldiers of the Mixed Monster Order, they were completely unresponsive.

“Clotho, bring the female knights forward, please.”

My slime buddy peeked out from my robe, leaped to the ground, and expanded a part of its body to sprout tentacles that snaked through the bars of the cage, entangling the women and lifting them up, then laying them out in a line facing us.

The surrounding Mixed Monster Order men raised a huge fuss, partly due to how graphic the whole process looked, but I made a conscious effort to block them out.

::Honey, the man who Charmed these women, this Clive person...did he really call himself a transmigrator?::

Hm? Oh, yeah, he did.

::I see...::

What of it?

::Never mind, we can talk about it later. Focus on what you’re doing for now::

If you say so.

With the bars between us, I stretched out my right hand towards one of the knights and cast Benediction Cure, which could dispel the majority of debuffs aside from curses. Full disclosure, it was my first time trying to heal the Charmed status. *Fingers crossed.*

“Nn...nnn...” Slowly, light returned to the woman’s eyes.

Whew, it worked. Let’s go and cast it on the others.



“How are they doing?” Nellas asked.

“They’re currently sleeping in a separate cage in makeshift beds,” I answered. “Their Charm debuff has been lifted, so they should be fine once they recover their stamina.”

After treating the female knights, I left Gerard and Sera to guard the cages as I made my way to the Elder’s house. The map on the Network told me this was where Efil was resting.

“But they’re still officers from Trycen’s army, aren’t they? Are you sure about that?”

“It’s preferable to leaving them in their Charmed state. What would we have done if they were ordered to kill themselves? We’ll hand off all the prisoners to the Adventurer’s Guild in Gaun.”

According to the letter from the Beast King, Leonhart Gaun, my Rank S promotion exam would be considered a “pass” once I successfully defended the Village of the Elves. There was no mention of what to do with any enemies that we captured. However, this quest had come through the Adventurer’s Guild, so it made sense that I would either hand them off to the Guild or to the adventurer serving as my exam proctor, King Leonhart himself.

But before I did so, I’d have Sera extract as much information as she could.

“Speaking of which, where is the Beast King observing us from, anyway? Did he actually get the notification that we protected the village?”

“Uh, about that, the truth is —”

“It’s fine, Nellas. I’ll explain it myself,” an imperious voice rang out from outside the door.

The owner of that voice pulled the door open and entered. It was the serving girl who had poured us tea earlier.

“And you are?”

“You’ll have to pardon my appearance. I am the Beast King of Gaun, Leonhart Gaun.”

“What?!” Rion exclaimed.

I somehow managed to prevent it from leaking onto my face, but I was also astonished. I used Analyze Eye on the woman, but her Status remained that of a common female elf.

“The Beast King...is a woman?”

“No. I’m using a magic item passed down through our family which enables me to take on the appearances of others. In short, it’s an illusion. Unfortunately, I am a man. I stayed close by in case anything went wrong, but it seems you’ve resolved the situation without needing my help.” Leonhart laughed smugly, clearly emanating a “gotcha!” aura.

A magic item that can fabricate not only appearance but also Status? Considering its capability, it must be Rank S.

“Are you sure about revealing the existence of a national treasure so openly, Your Majesty?” I asked carefully.

“You tell me. I believe I’ve gotten a pretty good grasp on your character while observing how you handled this battle. What’s more, you’re now the village’s champion. Isn’t that right, Nellas?”

“Without a doubt, Your Majesty!”

Leonhart threw himself onto the sofa across from me.

“Kelvin, I give you a pass for this exam. There was no damage to the village at all, and you even exposed the mastermind behind the enemy force. That said, I do have to deduct a few points for the damage to the forest itself.”

“I’m terribly sorry about that.”

“Even so, I’m extremely satisfied with the result. If we had dispatched a squad of our finest, the forest would have suffered even greater damage. Thank you for what you’ve done.”

Leonhart lowered his head deeply. At the moment, he looked like a normal village girl, but I didn’t feel that humbling himself was something he should be doing in his own territory. I hurriedly tried to convince him to stop, but he waved me off.

“Don’t worry about it. While masked by this appearance, no one would suspect me of being the king. The only one who knows is Nellas. By the way, this is his daughter’s visage, and I’ve been stepping in and taking her place every once in a while. It was quite funny one time when he got down on his knees before his own daughter.”

“Y-Your Majesty, please spare me...” Nellas begged, almost on the verge of tears.

“Oh? I still have so many stories, but all right,” Leonhart replied with a chuckle. He turned to look at me, taking out what looked like a stamp from his chest pocket. “Kelvin, I’ll make arrangements for the prisoners you captured. As part of the payment for your achievement, I’ll grant you my personal mark of authorization so that you can use Gaun’s teleportation gate. Go on, show me your guild card.”



“Ugh...where am I?” Clive groaned as he slowly returned to consciousness. He felt absolutely awful, as if he had just awoken from a nightmare. His cheek and legs hurt, and he felt terribly sluggish.

“This...is my room’s ceiling. I see...I see! Hahaha! So, I made it back alive!”

Although he still felt like shit, laughter bubbled up from his throat. It was a real pity he hadn’t managed to kill that goddamn impertinent black-robed asshole, but there would be plenty of chances in the future. The young man himself might be strong, but he seemed to have plenty of companions that could be used as leverage.

“That’s right. This time, I’ll use my Charm Eye —”

“Looks like you’ve come to.”

Clive turned his head to the right and saw the figure of a blond man he knew well. “What’re you doing here, Tristan?”

And it wasn’t just Tristan. He realized that his own subordinates

were also present, standing in a circle around his bed.

“Did you all come to check up on me, kitties? Oh, that’s right. Tristan, you saved me back there. Good job getting me out!”

“How could I not? You’re a transmigrator; your body is a world treasure. I only made the obvious choice.”

“Hahaha, you really do get me! It was the same when you recommended me for the position of General of the Magic Knight Order back in the day. You really do have an eye for value.”

“Well, your predecessor had just resigned...but speaking of that, it’s already been two years since you came to Trycen, hasn’t it. Time sure flies.”

“Thanks to you, it’s been a very enjoyable two years. Oh, you want to take one of my kitties home with you? I’ll give you your pick as thanks —”

When Clive tried to sit up, he realized that his hands, arms, neck, chest, and thighs were all tightly bound to the bed with rope-like restraints. He couldn’t move an inch.

“Uh...what is this, Tristan?”

“You finally noticed? I guess your dull head needed some time to fully wake up,” Tristan replied, tapping his temple with an index finger, his mouth twisting into a smile.

Clive recognized this smile of Tristan’s. He had seen it before when, on a whim, he had responded to a summoning of the generals and seen Tristan sneering at General Dan of the Steel Knight Order. The smile was a telltale sign that Tristan was up to no good.

Because they were similar in character, Clive was closer to him than to the other generals and could see through this habit of his. A cold sweat broke out over his forehead.

“C-C’mon man, spare me the weird jokes, will you?”

“Joke? What is the joke? Is it how you arbitrarily mobilized both the Mixed Monster Order and the Magic Knight Order but then lost to mere adventurers and came crawling back with your tail between your legs?”

“What are you saying? That was...you were the one who persuaded me to go! And I only mobilized my own Magic Knight Order!”

“No, no, no, what are *you* saying? The one who gave the orders to the officers of my Mixed Monster Order and brought my men and monsters out was *you*, Clive.”

“What the FUCK?!” Clive clenched his muscles in an attempt to free himself. “Ropes like these, I’ll just use my magi—”

“It won’t work. Those are special items that nullify magic. The only people who’d be able to break free with raw power are probably Prince Azgrad and General Dan. Oh, and in case you’re curious, I’ve

already reported to King Zel that you died in battle.”

“What exactly do you want?” Clive demanded with an accusatory glare.

His target, however, was entirely unfazed. “I said it, didn’t I? Who you are inside is one thing, but as a transmigrator, your *body* is priceless. Otherworlders are rare in this world, but actual transmigrators — those are even more so. I might not meet another one even if I waited centuries, so how can I let this wonderful body of yours slip through my fingers?”

Tristan signaled the knights nearby with his eyes. They parted left and right, revealing a large serving cart that looked like a table on wheels. The numerous objects arranged on top rattled slightly as one of the women pushed the cart close to where Clive lay.

“L-Little kitties, what are you doing? The protagonist is in a pinch here! Help me already!”

“Don’t bother. Did you think your Rank A Concealment was enough to hide the fact that you’d cast Charm Eye on the entire Magic Knight Order? The reason the country turned a blind eye to it so far was because of how much you were worth. Trycen is a meritocracy, so its people are willing to overlook certain things if you bring enough to the table. However, you messed up. Big time. That changes things. Now, the Magic Knight Order has become mine. I’m the new Acting General.”

“What...what did you say?!”

Tristan picked up an object from the cart. It was a dagger, and it was radiating a hair-raisingly ominous aura.

“My regular merchant is a resourceful guy. Isn’t it amazing? Take a look; *all* of these are cursed weapons. Oh, wow, this one just looks wicked, doesn’t it?”

“What are you planning to do...?”

“Hey, don’t worry, I won’t *kill* you. No, no, your body is too precious to let it die.”

A *squish* sounded as the rusty blade pierced Clive’s right shoulder.

“Hngg...aahhh...ahHHH!”

“These cursed blades hurt so badly that you feel like fainting, no? But don’t worry! I won’t let that happen.” The general Summoned a tapir-like monster next to Clive’s pillow. “This monster, called an incubaku, is extremely weak but possesses the ability to unlock someone’s emotions by eating the dreams of another. Just like this.”

The incubaku opened and closed its mouth several times over Clive’s head. Consequently, his consciousness, which had been attempting to detach itself from the pain, was yanked back to reality. Right back to where the pain was lying in wait.

“F-F-F-FUCK YOOUUUU!!”

“Good morning, sleepyhead. You really should listen when people are talking, you know? Look.”

With a muddy mind halfway torn between dream and reality, Clive summoned all his strength to look in the direction Tristan was pointing. A pink-colored mist was forming over the crowd of female knights, all of whom were slowly closing their eyes.

“By transferring the dreams seized from you, all inhibitions have been removed from their minds, freeing them to do whatever they desire most right now. This is not Charm, but a form of hypnosis.”

“Don’t tell meeee...”

“It should be fine, right? If they *really* love you, like you’ve always claimed, they should be doing exactly what you hope they’ll do.”

The front-most woman approached Clive, then picked up a blade from the cart.

“Oh, and in case you’re worried, all of them are wearing a simple anti-curse protection on their hands.”

“S-Stop, d-d-d-don’t —”

With a practiced hand, the female knight lifted the rapier in her hands, then plunged it straight into Clive’s thigh.

“AAAAHHHHHHHHHHH!!”

“Oh, dear, looks like she just happened to be in a bad mood. But you still have plenty of subordinates. I’m sure at least *one* of them would willingly reciprocate your feelings, right? Uh oh, your HP is looking a bit low there. You, and you, take turns healing the general. I’m sure he’ll be grateful.”

The two knights he had pointed to smirked nastily.

“H-h-h-how DARE you d-d-d-do this to m-m-meeee!!”

“Whoops, is that really the time? I’m sorry, looks like I have to run to a meeting. I won’t be back for...several weeks, so I hope you enjoy yourself while I’m gone. I’ve made arrangements to replenish the cursed weapons that are used up, so...have fun!”

“Y-Y-Y-You stop right there!”

“Ciao!”

With a merciless *click*, the door to the room closed. In the short time it had been open, Clive had spied a line of female knights waiting outside.

A sight that once brought him untold delight now instilled nothing but terror. His inescapable hell was going to continue for some time.



Tristan proceeded down the corridor in a great mood, his shoes making crisp clacks on the floor.

So, that was a total of one thousand three hundred and forty-two

cursed weapons. I should probably praise Jildora for preparing so many in such a short timeframe, but some of them weren't the best quality. Looks like it's going to take a while for Clive's body to be ready. I'm sure his ego will be long gone by then, but at the very least, he'll hopefully turn into a fascinating monster.

The headquarters of the Magic Knight Order was unnaturally silent. There wasn't even a whisper that could be heard.

Cashel had a little bit of talent, so I might have taken him in as a subordinate and trained him up properly if he hadn't run away from home, but...oh well, that younger brother of mine has always been a coward and a pervert whose only hobby was killing people, so I guess I don't need him after all.

"But enough of that. It won't be much longer before we declare war on the continent. Things are finally getting interesting."



The morning after Tristan returned to Trycen from the Forest of Crests, King Zel summoned the generals to the Roundtable Room. Azgrad, Dan, Tristan, and Shutola were currently in the room, which made for full attendance with the exception of Clive.

"That bastard isn't just playing hookie this time, is he?" Azgrad asked.

"Apparently, he went somewhere with his subordinates," Dan replied. "One of my men saw him flying off with Green Magic several nights ago."

"That's the reason I called this meeting," said Zel.

"Clive's the reason? What's he gone and done this time, old man?"

"Please allow me to do the explaining, Crown Prince," Tristan offered.

"You know something about this?"

Tristan got up and walked to the center of the room with somewhat theatrical gestures. "It was in the deep of night, four days ago. The day General Dan's subordinate saw him leaving. The lieutenant general of my Mixed Monster Order, along with the majority of my colonels plus their troops and monsters, all went missing."

"Missing? What are you talking about? Aren't they out on an expedition right now?" Azgrad looked up and to the side as if recalling something. "To subjug— Ah, since it's you guys, to 'capture' a monster, right?"

"That was indeed the purpose with which Lieutenant General Ulfred and his men set out, even going so far as to bring along Gigant Lord, the hidden ace of my Order, no less."

"Now I'm understanding why you said 'missing' even less."

As a Rank S monster, Gigant Lord's destructive power and toughness were such that there were only a handful of people in Trycen who could defeat it. Throwing a whole army at it was one thing, but in a one-versus-one scenario, the only ones who could handle it were Dan, Clive with his Rank S magic, or Azgrad on a dragon.

If Gigant Lord was part of a formation that included half of the Tamers and monsters in the Mixed Monster Order, even another Rank S monster wouldn't be their match.

"I don't get it either," Dan rumbled. "And how's this related to Cli — Wait, don't tell me..."

"Your mind is as sharp as ever, General Dan. That's right. Just as he did to his own subordinates, General Clive used his Unique Skill, Charm Eye, on *my* troops."

Tristan's words set off a buzz around the room. The attending lieutenant generals seemed especially flustered.

This was true also of Lieutenant General Jin of the Steel Knight Order, who had not known that Clive possessed such a skill. Suddenly, the pieces of the puzzle fell into place and he understood why the Magic Knight Order had changed so drastically over the past two years.

He turned to his father. "General Dan, you knew about this?!"

"Mm. It was top secret, though."

"How could you keep quiet about something like that?! That's far too —"

"That was the agreement," Zel stated.

Jin had flown into a rage as the terrible revelation caused the blood to rush his head, but the moment he heard Zel's voice, his emotions were strangely calmed, as if a bucket of ice water had been dumped over his head.

What was that? he thought to himself, feeling a cold sweat trickling down his back. He hadn't the faintest idea what had just been done to him.

Paying the young man no attention, King Zel continued to speak. "Who remembers when Clive's predecessor, Lunoir Victoria, left our army along with her lieutenant general?"

"Lunoir...haven't heard that name in quite a while," Azgrad replied with a nostalgic look. "Aside from Dan, she's the only one who's ever been able to match my spear."

"She was the youngest Trycenian general in history, wasn't she? Fearful is the power of youth indeed. If I remember correctly, she simply left a note behind and slipped out in the dead of night. What a pity, truly..." Tristan trailed off.

Zel nodded gravely. "Indeed, the hole left in our army by her

absence was massive. We tried searching for her but to no avail. And equally fruitless was our search for someone to succeed her.”

“And that’s when that bastard Clive appeared,” Azgrad finished.

Two years ago, several days after Lunoir’s disappearance, word had spread of a remarkable Green Mage. The man’s magic far exceeded the abilities of anyone in Trycen, particularly in the realm of defense. Furthermore, he possessed a face and voice that seemed far too perfect for normal men. It was only a matter of time before his name became known.

Naturally, Trycen had reached out to the man: Clive. The country had hoped he would be capable of filling Lunoir’s shoes. He was secretly invited to Trycen Castle and subjected to intense scrutiny.

The man’s response to the offer, however, beggared belief.

“If it’s a workplace with lots of girls, then maaaybe I can consider it.”

It was a train of thought that seemed to belong to a puerile boy who’d retained his immature mental age while growing into the body of an adult. Those evaluating him despaired. They chastised themselves for having been taken in by mere rumors.

But that dismissal had been revoked almost immediately. The tremendous power of the magic the man displayed, and the astonishing capabilities of the equipment and items in his possession, could not be denied. Additionally, he had connections with an enigmatic merchant, a highly suspicious dwarf who always kept his face hidden in the depths of his hooded robe but dealt in top-tier goods. Supposedly, this merchant even had a pipeline to items of legendary fame.

Eventually, this hooded stranger became a dedicated purveyor of powerful goods to Trycen, and Clive was installed as the general of the Magic Knight Order, with the condition that he was free to do as he pleased with the female knights under his command.

“You all know the particulars of how Clive joined our army,” Zel said.

“Of course, we also made him agree to constantly present results and to abide by a few conditions of our own,” Tristan added.

“Naturally, this is highly classified information. If this ever leaks out...do I have to finish the sentence?”

The air of intimidation emanating from the king prompted all the lieutenant generals to nod their heads furiously. Jin, however, still looked conflicted.

“Lieutenant General Jin, I think you’re smart enough to figure this out without having it spelled out for you, but this was something that our country needed at the time,” Dan chided, before adding, “Although it does make my stomach churn.”

“I...understand.”

Tristan suddenly clapped his hands loudly, gathering the attention of everyone present.

“It seems we’ve digressed quite a bit. So let’s get to the most important part. After Charming my Mixed Monster Order, General Clive, of all things, went to attack the Forest of Crests in Gaun!”

“Where the Village of Elves is?”

“As expected of Shutola-sama, general of Black Ops, the breadth of your knowledge is as wide as the ocean.”

“Enough with the empty flattery. Why did he take such a risk in going all the way there?”

“Using the Magic Knight Order, for which we’ve given tacit consent for that bastard to do with as he pleased, is one thing. We cannot overlook him seizing control of another Order,” Azgrad spat with a grimace.

“Everyone, I ask you to think about this *very* carefully. We’re talking about General Clive on one side...and elves on the other. Isn’t it obvious what was going through his mind? He went there to kidnap them.”

An awkward silence filled the room.

“Come on, even that bastard wouldn’t go *that* far...”

“And yet, Esteemed Brother, there have indeed been reports of monsters kidnapping elves of late.”

“I suppose we’ll never know for sure,” Tristan stated, regaining control of the conversation. “After all, General Clive lost his life in action.”

“What? *Clive*? Dead?”

“That’s right. A group of adventurers who happened to be in the village turned the tables on him.”

“You’re joking!” Azgrad cried, pounding the table in agitation. “That bastard may be a hopeless lust demon, but he had the strength to back it up. He’s worlds apart from that pathetic figurehead, Christoph!”

“Hold on, hold on, please let me finish. I happened to get a look at this adventurer by using one of my beloved monsters. To my surprise, his appearance is a perfect match for the adventurer who supposedly accompanied the Heroes during their takedown of Christoph. Do you remember the report that you presented earlier, Shutola-sama?”

“Ah, that one. You were the one who asked for it, Esteemed Brother. As part of our investigation of the Heroes, we caught wind of an adventurer from Parth who’s abruptly risen to prominence over the past few months. His name is Kelvin, if I remember correctly.”

“And you’re saying that’s the guy who did Clive in?”

“Not only General Clive,” said Tristan. “During their encounter,

this adventurer's companions also annihilated the Charmed members of the Mixed Monster Order, including Gigant Lord. Thinking about it now, Christoph and his party were close in level to the Heroes...how, then, were they captured so easily? I'm starting to suspect that this Kelvin character's hand in it was bigger than we initially thought."

"The dots do seem to connect," Dan murmured thoughtfully.

"What is this newcomer like?" Having remained silent until then, King Zel finally showed some interest.

"At the risk of sounding dramatic, he has the appearance of the Grim Reaper. I saw him wield an enormous scythe, and he was clad in a black robe. Most telling, he had a full-faced smile throughout the entire fight."

"A Grim Reaper, you say. So, he's strong..."

"Hahaha, of all people to catch the attention of, that Clive bastard went and encountered a Grim Reaper!"

Trycen's circumstances were worse than ever. Yet both King Zel and Prince Azgrad appeared to be in a good mood, although for rather different reasons.

"I ask you once more, what is it that our country should be doing now?"



"Goddammit, my head hurts. Just what is His Majesty thinking?"

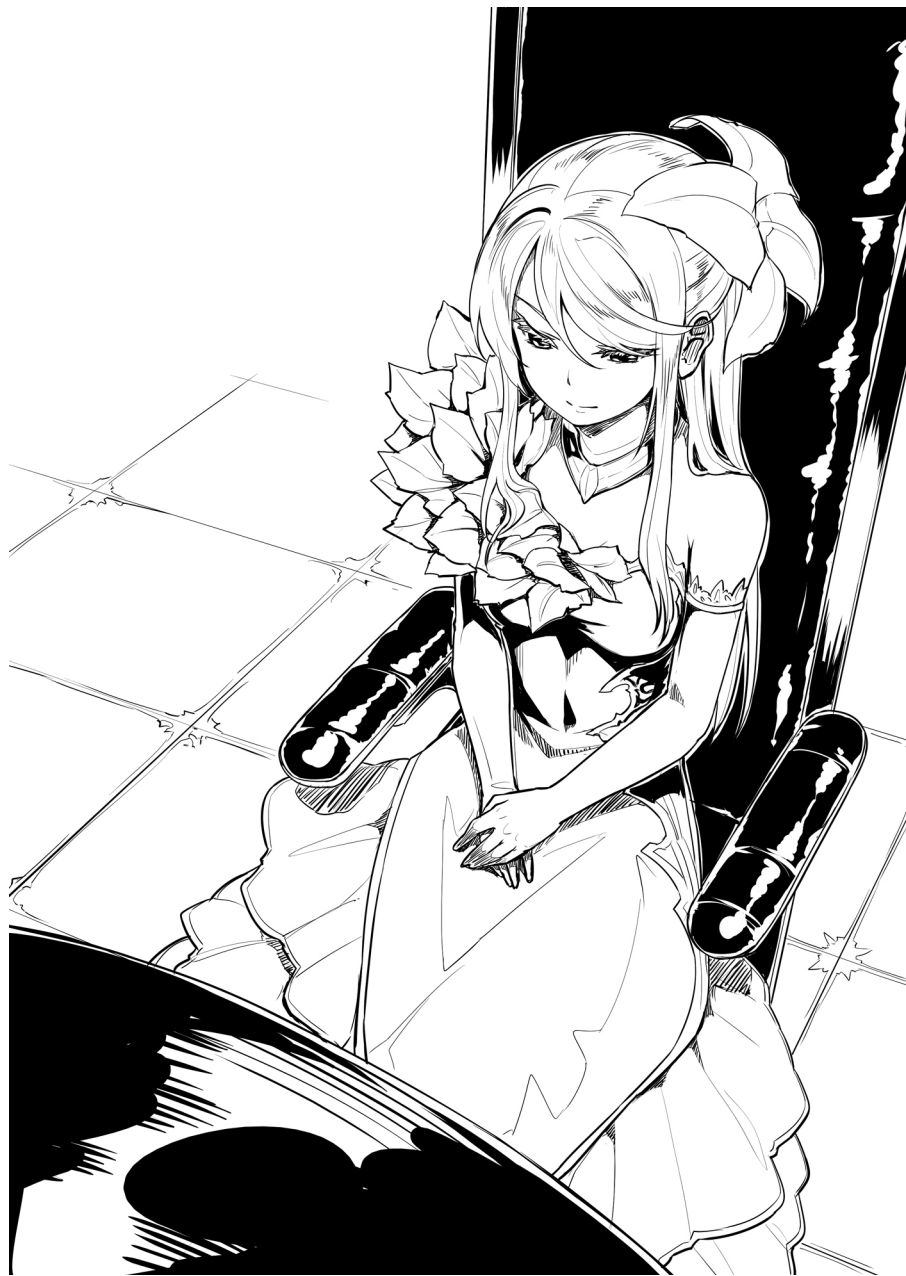
Once the meeting ended, most of the attendees had promptly taken their leave. The only ones currently still in the room were Dan, Jin, and Shutola.

"General Dan, are you all right?"

"There's no need to worry about me. But this confirmation of war and transfer of the Magic Knight Order to Tristan...none of it seems to make sense. His Majesty has changed so much. He used to be a steady and reliable presence like you, Shutola-sama."

Seeing Dan hang his head, Shutola sighed slowly, as if to relax her nerves.

"Dan. Jin. There's something I want to discuss with you two. Would you lend me your time?"





Beneath the base of the Dragon Knight Order was a deep, deep ravine. Or rather, it would be more accurate to describe it as the base having been built on a bridge that hung over the ravine.

The dragons ridden by the knights of the order kept their nests within that gorge, where they deepened their bonds with their partners and trained each other up every day.

Although Trycen generally touted human supremacy, things were different in this place. Here, humans and dragons were equals who placed their trust in each other. It had once been part of the Mixed Monster Order, but with the installation of Azgrad as general, his drastically different principles led to a breaking off and the establishment of an entirely separate branch.

The layout of the valley was such that the stronger the dragon, the farther down they could make their nest. As such, Azgrad's beloved partner was at the very bottom. It was dark down there, and visibility was questionable even when the sun was at its zenith and shining straight down. The entire floor of the valley was reserved for this one single beast.

"Hey there, you doing all right? Then again, you're just sleeping all the time, really. Oh, come on, still sulking?" Azgrad's tone was warm and companionable, as if he were speaking to a close friend. "The collar goes against my principles, you know that. It's honest and open communication that makes us dragon knights what we are. But we've gone over that before. Today, I've come to bring interesting news. Apparently, a man who's capable of killing Gigant Lord and Clive has appeared."

The dragon's eyelids twitched.

"That caught your attention, didn't it? A real man can't help but get a thrill from hearing that! As the son of the mighty Darkness Dragon King, I knew you'd get it!"



Thanks to King Leonhart adding his stamp of authorization to my guild card, the capital of Gaun was added to the list of places I could visit using the teleportation gate. According to him, Gaun's gate was also beneath their royal palace, just like Toraj's. The king generously promised to sort things out with the gatekeeper so that I was free to come and go whenever I wanted.

The night we beat back the Trycenian army, another force from Gaun arrived at the Forest of Crests and took up position as a new

border protection garrison. I didn't get to meet him in person, but apparently this was an elite group personally led by one of Leonhart's sons.

"They arrived just in time to help mop up the stray monsters. I've ordered them to shift to guard duty as soon as they're done."

At least, that's what Leonhart told me, but my guess was that he had already stationed the force nearby in case something went wrong during our defense of the village. For him, protecting the elves was a top priority, regardless of whether I passed my exam or not.

That night, the entire village came out in full force to throw a gigantic feast. Even Efil, who would normally insist on sticking to her duties as a maid, enjoyed it a lot. I noticed her eating a lot more than she usually did. Perhaps as a half-elf, the cuisine here particularly matched her palate.

Most of the dishes were made from ingredients that could be found in the forest, such as mushrooms and fruits, and had rather simple seasonings. There was also a boar-like monster on offer, although I had a feeling that was something that had been specially prepared out of consideration for my party and the newly arrived Gaunian soldiers who were stationed there.

Having grown used to Efil's exceptional cooking, I did find the fare slightly unsatisfying, but the elves kept offering me more, causing me to overeat quite a bit regardless. However, I'd like to state for the record that I didn't come close to consuming even a fifth of what Melfina ate. I swear she was packing away more food than the volume of her entire body.

Every once in a while, Nellas's daughter came to refill my cup with fruit wine. Each time, I would brace myself, fearing it would be King Leonhart instead. It really was troublesome that even Analyze Eye couldn't tell the difference. Considering how masterfully the Beast King copied the girl's very aura, even Nellas couldn't be blamed for mistaking the two of them.

As for my companions, they were pretty much their usual partying selves. Having gotten completely sloshed, Sera came to mess with me and just wouldn't let go. Gerard stood on top of a platform that I could swear hadn't been there earlier that day and was sharing the highlights of the fight.

"Kelviiiin! Aren't I deserving, *hic*, of some comp'ments too!"

"All right, all right. Good job, Sera. Good girl, good girl. Can you *please* let me go already?"

"There y'go trynna change the subjec' again!"

"And so I said, 'If you wish to pass, you'll have to defeat me first!'"

A roar of cheers went up. *Dude, but you didn't do any fighting...*

“I say, wer’you lookin’ off to!”

I had started off drinking slowly by myself but somehow ended up being caught in the chaos. *Shit, I think I feel my bones creaking.*

“Ah, I’ve found you, Kel-nii! Things have gotten really crazy where Mel-nee’s at!”

“I think I’m more worried about how crazy things are getting with my arm right now.”

“What? Isn’t that a side benefit, though? That’s how it’s always depicted in manga.”

I can’t even feel my hand anymore. Do you understand how tiresome it is using healing magic to continuously restore my own arm before it snaps?

“Anyway, never mind that! Mel-nee is having an eating contest with the Gaunian soldiers over there, and she’s already beaten six of them! Apparently, some of the elves had to go out to hunt more game because the ingredients ran out.”

“She still had room for more?” *She’d already eaten enough portions for several people when she was at my table earlier...*

“Riiiiiooon, itz my time now! Go’way, shoo, shoo!”

“Sera-nee, how about I get you to bed? We’re leaving tomorrow morning, remember?”

“I don’ waaaaant to!”

In spite of her petite frame, Rion managed to forcibly peel Sera off me and give her a piggyback ride. Sera put up some token resistance, but in her drunken state, she was no match for the sober Hero. And the position of riding piggyback seemed to have done the trick in triggering her sleepiness, as my demon companion promptly fell silent and started breathing peacefully.

“Looks like you’ve had a pretty tough time of it, Kel-nii.”

“Thanks, you saved me. My arm was literally about to bend in a direction it’s definitely not supposed to.”

“That just goes to show how much Sera-nee thinks of you. As a man, you’ve got to answer her feelings properly.”

I’m trying, I really am. Would it help if I bumped Iron Wall up a rank or two?

“Since it’s already quite late, I think I’ll bring Sera-nee to bed and then go to sleep myself.”

“Sounds good. Good night, Rion. I know I’ve said it several times already, but you really did an amazing job today.”

“Nah, what was amazing was your commanding. I only did what anyone would have done in my position. But, I mean, if I could have a reward...”

“Is there something you want?”

“Hmmm...never mind, it’s a secret. Good night!”

After seeing them off, I was left on my own. *Well then, it’s about*

time. We'll be striking off for Parth in the morning. Rion and Sera have already gone to bed, so I should probably do the same. Gerard I can just leave alone, as he'll wake up on time anyway. But Melfina's extremely bad with mornings. Looks like she's still in the middle of her eating contest too, so I might have to force her to go to bed.

"Which leaves only...Efil."



A gentle breeze blew across the top of the wall, carrying away the faint sounds of merriment that had traveled all the way from the village square. Efil stood alone, looking up at the eastern sky, her blond hair flowing in the wind.

"What're you doing here?"

"Oh, Master."

When I called out, she noticed my presence immediately and turned towards me with a smile. *Her face looks a bit red. I did see her drinking a little tonight, even though she normally doesn't partake. Could that be why?*

"Guess this wall's gotta go tomorrow too. I did promise to revert everything to the way it was once the battle was over."

"Master, Nellas-sama told me that he doesn't mind the wall staying. The men of the village have taken quite a liking to it."

"Really? Well, then it stays, I suppose."

"I'm sure they'll be delighted. But at the very least, let's revert the water in the moat back to normal," Efil said, giggling a little.

"You look kind of flushed. Did you drink a bit too much?"

"Th-That's not it, Master. I only drank a single cup tonight."

"Ah, then you're tired from fielding all the words of gratitude from the villagers? You should have continued lying down a bit longer and gotten more rest."

"Thank you for your concern, Master."

The conversation came to an end there, and silence filled the air. Efil's face remained red, but her expression was that of marvel.

"I can still hardly believe everything that's happened here. I'm really thankful that we came. Nellas-sama and everyone else have treated me so warmly even though only half of my blood is elven. Most of all, I got to learn something about my mother."

Efil's mother, Rumil, was an elf who supposedly bore an uncanny resemblance to her daughter. Unfortunately, she had long since died, so there was no way to meet her in person. Even so, having found a clue about her seemed to mean a lot to Efil, who had spent her entire life as an orphan.

"I still know nothing about my father or how I came to be, but something that made me happy enough not to dwell on that

happened, so..." During the latter half of her sentence, Efil's voice grew softer and softer until it was almost unintelligible. Inversely, her face seemed to grow redder and redder.

"Are you sure you're all right, Efil? It's pretty late...you want to go to bed?"

"Y-Yes, let's go to bed together!" I turned to descend the stairs, but she suddenly called me back. "Master, I...I will support you with all my might, even more than I've done so far. So, um, may...may I continue serving you for the rest of my life?"

Efil waited for my answer with a hand touching the collar on her neck and her eyes averted anxiously. What she was wearing was a Slave Collar, an item commonly used to make a slave obey their master's bidding. As there was absolutely no need for it in our case, I'd offered to remove it numerous times, but she always firmly refused me, saying, "You gave me this yourself, Master, and it is my pride and joy. Please do not take it away from me."

I must have done a bad job if she's making such a worried face. Come on, I'll only ever have one answer to that question.



On top of his platform, Gerard was continuing to enthusiastically recount the day's events.

"Then my king, Kelvin, looked straight at the enemy general and declared, 'Don't you dare lay a hand on my woman!'"

The elves whistled and stomped their feet as they reached the height of their excitement listening to the knight's gripping tale. On the other side of the square, Melfina, surrounded on all sides by the unconscious forms of the collapsed Gaunian soldiers, brought her hands together, saying, "Phew, what a delicacy that was. Let us always be grateful for the food we eat."

All in all, the scene was absolute chaos.

::Well then, I think I'll be heading off to bed soon. What about you, Ger— Hold on!::

::What's the matter, Princess?:: Gerard replied, emanating the air of someone who had just managed a huge accomplishment.

::Try listening to the sounds being picked up by the Clotho clone accompanying Efil on top of the wall::

::My, oh, my. My king has blocked off the Network, but he's clearly forgotten about Clotho's presence::

::Those are truly cringy things he's saying. Even I'm getting embarrassed listening in::

::I can't just let this go, now can I?::

Gerard once again stepped up to the stage.

"Apologies for the wait, all! This is the best part yet, so listen up!

This is the final part of the performance by yours truly, so here goes!”

In response, the elves as well as the soldiers, who had just begun to return to life, roared with elation and pumped their fists in the air.

“Oh, you’re going to tell them? Uh...sorry, honey!”

Unbeknownst to him at the time, this night would go down in Kelvin’s memory as a dark, dark episode indeed.



Early the next day, we bid farewell to the Village of Elves and set off for Parth. Nellas and the villagers all invited us to stay a while longer, but Ellie and Ruka were waiting for us back home. The longer we remained gone, the more they would worry.

The elves gathered every last coin they had and tried to give it all to us, but we turned them down. We couldn’t very well bankrupt them. We asked them instead to gather the kind of fresh produce that could only be found in their forest.

Ah, Efil likes this fruit. They sure knew what to bring back.

At the village gate, Nellas and Leonhart — who was again borrowing the appearance of the Elder’s daughter — saw us off.

“Rest assured, Gaun will take responsibility for protecting the village. Next time, use the teleportation gate and come visit our capital. We’ll welcome you.”

“I hope you’ll finally show us your real appearance then!”

“Ha! Ha! Ha! Very well, I promise you. Though I imagine you’ll be busy for quite a while, having reached Rank S.”

“What do you mean?”

“The birth of a new Rank S adventurer calls for a citywide celebration. After all, it is something that only occurs once every few years or so across the entire continent.”

“Uh, you know, I prefer not being in the spotlight so much...”

“Come now, it’s not such a bad thing. Being famous has its perks too. Plus, the celebrations are one of the citizens’ rare sources of entertainment. It’s tradition to pull out all the stops on the day of the promotion ceremony itself. The last time was...that’s right, Sylvia, a year ago. She shot right up through the ranks just as you did. When I think about it that way, the recent rookies all seem so talented. As it happens, her promotion was held in Gaun, and we threw her the biggest celebration ever! Of course, she herself was too embarrassed to attend any of it! Ha ha ha!”

Uh, doesn’t that mean she basically ran away? And wait, they went ahead with the celebration even though the guest of honor never showed? Wow. Just...wow.

“So, you really are leaving us, Kelvin-dono, Efil-san...” said Nellas dolefully.

“Thank you for everything yesterday, Nellas-sama,” returned Efil with a refined bow.

“It was nothing compared to what you’ve done for us. We are the ones who should be saying thanks!” Nellas replied in a fluster as he and the elves behind him all lowered their heads deeply.

Wow, it feels so strange being bowed to by so many people.

“Please think of this village as your true home and come visit whenever you want. Every one of us will be waiting. Oh dear, I almost forgot.” The Elder took out a small jeweled box and passed it to Efil. “Efil-san, this is yours.”

“Umm, what is this?”

“It is a memento of your mother, Rumil. Please take it with you. I’m sure she would have wanted you to have it.”

“My mother’s...memento...” Efil accepted the box, then silently lifted the lid to peer inside. “A hair clip?”

“Rumil was wearing this when we found her. In fact, it was the only undamaged item on her.”

“The emerald ornaments look lovely, don’t they? Good for you, Efil!” said Sera, looking closely at the clip from the side.

I activated Analyze Eye from my position a bit farther away. Not only was this “Magical Jewel Hair Clip” beautifully ornamented, it had also been crafted in such a way that the properties of the Magical Jewels embedded in it retained their functional properties. In fact, I would venture a guess that the efficacy of the Magical Jewels was even higher than it had been when they were in their raw, unprocessed form.

There was no doubt this was the handiwork of a master artisan. The hair clip was in the shape of a small flower, with tiny emeralds embedded in each petal. What it lacked in flashiness, it more than made up for with elegance and beauty.

“Efil, how about trying it on? I’m sure it’ll suit you,” I suggested.

“M-May I really?” she asked hesitantly.

“It’s already yours,” Nellas replied. “Feel free to do as you wish with it.”

“Um, in that case...Master, can you do it for me?”

“Gotcha.”

I circled around behind and let her hair down, then carefully redid it using the magical clip. Every once in a while at home, when I woke up early enough, I would brush her hair. Thanks to that experience, I somehow managed to do her hair up quite nicely.

“How is it?” she asked, turning only her head around.

Nellas nodded, touched. “As I expected, it suits you as well as it suited your mother.”

“It really pops against your blond hair. It’s perfect!” added Sera.

“You look wonderful,” confirmed Melfina.

Just as everyone was saying, the hair clip looked so good on Efil, it was as if it had been specially made for her. The older elves who’d personally known Rumil brushed tears from the corners of their eyes.

Looking happy, Efil shot me furtive little glances. I looked straight at her and said clearly, “Efil, you look beautiful.”

“Th...Thank you very much. That makes me so happy.”

As we stared into each other’s eyes, the atmosphere surrounding us gradually started to turn sweet—

Clap, clap!

“All right, all right! Kel-nii, Efil-nee, leave that for after we get back, okay?” chided Rion, dispelling that atmosphere around us with two loud claps.

Is it just me or is my little sister getting really on top of things lately? Her growth makes me happy, but couldn’t she have waited just a bit longer — Oh, okay, now I notice all the stares from the elves behind us and the Gaunian soldiers on top of the wall. Perhaps beating a hasty retreat is the best thing to do here.

“Ahem! Well then, Beast King, Nellas-san, we’ll be taking our leave.”

“Mm. I look forward to your future exploits.”

“Thank you once again for everything! I wish you godspeed!”



Just as we had done for our journey to the village, we ran the whole way back. *If we hurry, we can make it home within the day.*

::My king, I was thinking, maybe it’s time I come out....::

Gerard, you are sentenced to a week of house arrest inside my magic pool. I will never forget what you did last night. Do you even know how much of a commotion Efil and I found ourselves in after coming down from the wall? Come to think of it, the reason for all those stares just now was mainly because of you. Even my hair stands on end when I remember what I myself said to Efil last night, and you exposed it to the whole village? Know the weight of your crime. We are so done!

::Uh...I don’t think the staring just now had anything to do with me.::

::Gramps, I kind of understand how you feel, but you really shouldn’t have done that.::

::Rion, child, if you take their side, then I really have nothing to say in return....::

::However, I’m also partially responsible as I was present and did nothing to stop him. As punishment for myself, I’ll refrain from having seconds for a week!::

Melfina’s bombshell statement evoked an alarmed “*What?!*” from

everyone through the Network.

Don't be hasty, Melfina!

::Kelvin's right! Mel, your body won't last the week!::

::Princess! You really don't have to keep someone like me company!::

::I can't subject you to such a cruel and unusual punishment, Mel-nee....::

::That would be very troubling, Melfina-sama. The amount of ingredients I procured were calculated based on your normal rate of consumption. If you don't eat it, I'll have to, um...should I give it to Clo-chan? Wait, or maybe I could bring some to share with Clare-san....::

Everyone tried their best to convince Melfina to drop her mad scheme. Given how familiar we'd become with seeing her enthusiastically wolfing down her food, the sight of her suppressing her appetite would undoubtedly fill us with a deep concern that she was unwell.

::To think that you all appreciate me so much! All right, I understand. I'll do my best to eat as much as I can, then!::

And so, it was with laughter and friendly banter that we made our way back to Parth.



The sun had almost set by the time we returned. As always, two golems holding halberds were standing guard before the front gate. I was relieved to see that nothing had happened in our absence.

When we passed through the gate and reached the fountain, we found Ruka weeding the garden. Before we could say anything, she noticed our approach and rushed over with her small strides.

"Master! Welcome back!"

"Hey there, Ruka. Have you been a good girl and listened to what Ellie said?"

"Mhm! We worked hard taking care of the place! Welcome back to you too, Efil-sama!"

"We're glad to be back," my Head Maid replied. "All right, show me what you two have done. I'll go check on it now."

"So soon?! Sh-Shouldn't you rest up first?"

Ruka was pulling a face, probably because of how strict Efil's usual instruction was. Although she had a gentle personality and was normally kind to everyone, Efil would not compromise an inch when it came to her professional duties. She applied this high standard to Ruka and Ellie as well, consequently putting them through some pretty tough training each day.

Even so, the two of them trusted her greatly, proving that she was

a good leader who knew how to properly share her vision and connect with subordinates on a personal level. Well, that and the staff meals she made every once in a while probably played a part too. Once, I'd just happened to walk past an open door where Ruka was eating while tears streamed down her face.

"Efil sure is a tactician, winning over master and subordinates alike through our stomachs" is what I'd normally say, but since it's her we're talking about, she probably just wanted to reward Ruka for her hard work.

Thanks to this educational approach of Efil's, even I, as an amateur, could tell that Ellie and Ruka's skills were improving by leaps and bounds every day. They had also amassed plenty of levels and skill points, so I was genuinely looking forward to seeing how they developed in the future.

"Oh, right, we brought back souvenirs! Ta-da!" said Rion, taking out one of the fruits that we'd received from the Village of Elves and giving it to the little girl.

"Wow! I've never seen this kind of fruit before! Can I eat it, Rion-sama?"

"Sure you can! It's like a pear; you'll love it. We have plenty, so go ask Efil-nee to cut you another one sometime, all right?"

"Oh, oh, I've already learned how to cut fruit! Want me to show you the results of my traini—"

"What's all the commotion, Ruka? Oh, Master!"

Having been drawn by our voices, Ellie appeared at the door. Just like Ruka, she noticed us immediately. *Was she in the middle of cleaning the lobby?*

"Welcome home. I sincerely apologize for not noticing sooner."

"Don't worry about it. We literally just got back."

"Did anything happen in our absence?" Efil asked.

"No, nothing. Oh, but we did receive a letter from the Adventurer's Guild addressed to Master."

A letter to me from the guild? I imagine it must be related to the promotion. "Would you bring it to me in the living room later?"

"Yes, Master."

Considering the hour, I'll just read the thing and show up at the guild tomorrow.

"By the way, where's Grandpa Gerard?" asked Ruka.

"Gerard is...on a week-long training journey."

"Aww, I wanted to show him my awesome peeling skills too," she said with a pout, moving one of her hands as if it were a knife and applying it to the fruit she was holding.

"Don't worry, I'll take responsibility and eat Gerard's share too," Melfina offered.

"Ah, then I'd like some as well. That fruit is pretty delicious," Sera

chimed in.

I nodded in agreement. “Sounds like a good idea. Let’s all have some after dinner.” *With that settled, it’s time to head inside and rest up a bit.*

::My king! My king! I beg of you, please let me have some too! This is the plea of a lifetime!::

It wasn’t exactly a handmade dish, but was still fruit cut by Ruka’s hands, and Gerard doted on her so much. However, his cry from the soul fell on deaf ears. I had slightly dialed down the volume of his voice for the duration of his house arrest, so it wasn’t all that distracting.

I didn’t realize beforehand how truly cruel this punishment would be. At this rate, Gerard’s mind might break down. I might have to shorten the duration of his sentence a bit.



The larger room on the first floor was our living room, and it was decked out with all the furniture that Efil had carefully selected with the aim of making it a space where a significant number of people could relax.

Before the Western-style hearth was a rug made from the hide of a white sable that we had caught ourselves. The rather sizable sofa was Sera and Rion’s favorite lounging spot, and I would always find them lazing about on it at this time of day.

“Ahhh, home really is the best,” sighed Sera blissfully.

“I know, right? It feels even better after such a long time away,” Rion agreed.

“Look at you two already monopolizing the couch as soon as we’re back.”

When I entered the room, the girls had already settled themselves in. The couch was indeed quite large, but there wasn’t enough space for a third person to sit when the two of them spread themselves out like that. Before I knew it, Alex emerged from Rion’s shadow and curled up before the fireplace as well.

While I was considering purchasing another sofa, Efil spoke up from behind me, holding a tray bearing cups of tea in her hand. The unique aroma told me that it was likely a blend from the Village of Elves.

“Excuse me, I’m coming in. Ah, Master, what time do you want dinner?”

“Hm, everyone’s still winding down right now, so how about in an hour? Oh, wait, but you’re tired too, Efil.”

Although we had taken a few breaks, we’d run at a pretty brisk pace on our way back to Parth. I felt bad asking her to cook so soon

after returning.

"I want to say that I'm completely fine, but Ellie and Ruka convinced me otherwise. Tonight, the two of them will be preparing the food."

"Oh, that's a first. I know they've been learning from you and helping out with the cooking so far, but tonight is the first time they'll be handling everything by themselves, isn't it?"

Efil had a certain pride with regard to the kitchen, which would sometimes spur her to push herself to do the cooking even when she was tired. I'd been thinking about forcing her to take a rest, but thankfully, I didn't have to go that far.

"That just goes to show how worried they are about you," said Melfina, walking in with a large platter piled with cookies.

"Mel-sama, please allow me to carry the snacks."

"Nuh-uh, this is for me to handle. Have you already forgotten what Ellie told you? You do have a tendency to take everything on yourself."

"But..."

"No 'but's. Place more trust in those around you. Especially your subordinates. They really do want to help take some of the burden off your shoulders."

"What's happened?" *Did a problem crop up where I wasn't aware?*

"Nothing happened, really, it's just that when I tried to start preparing the ingredients, the two of them stopped me and told me to rest."

"And that was when I jauntily entered the scene and threw my support behind them," added Melfina as she shoved a cookie into Efil's mouth. Efil munched on it, looking embarrassed. "I know you told Kelvin you'd try harder, but you mustn't overwork yourself. If you end up collapsing as a result, you'd just be making him sad. That's not what you want, is it?"

"You're...right. I suppose I may have been causing everyone undue worry. Master, I guarantee Ellie and Ruka's growth. Would you please give their cooking a try?"

"Well, let me see..." I said, approaching her and evoking a "Fhwat?" from her by pinching both her cheeks. "Do you even have to ask? These are your apprentices we're talking about here. I'd be more than happy to try their food."

"That's right, Efil, you should be more laid-back."

"Yep, yep, just like us!"

Sera and Rion, you two are too laid-back.

"Going all out as a maid is fine and all, but do make sure to take some time for yourself every once in a while, okay? With that in mind, you two, share some of your laid-backness with Efil," ordered the

goddess.

“You got it!”

“Aye, aye, sir!”

I snatched the tray from Efil’s hands.

“Wh-Whaaaat?”

“Come on, let’s laze around together over there!”

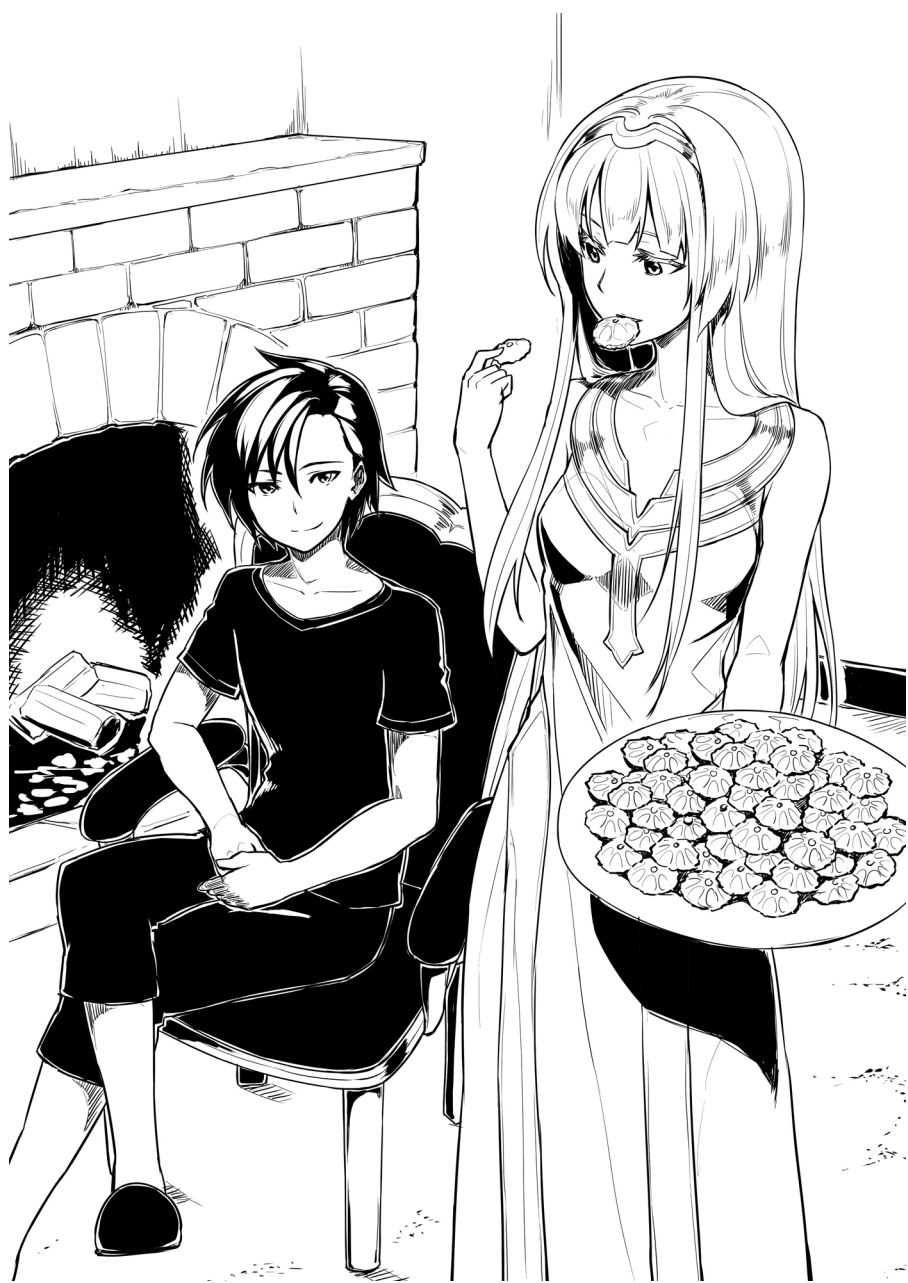
“Efil-nee, rest is to be celebrated and cherished! Come, come!”

Slowly but surely, my maid was dragged over to the devilish sofa. It would be troubling if she became too much like them, but it was true that I wanted her to occasionally have some downtime.

“Mel, thank you for caring for Efil. It seems she’s been pushing herself quite a bit after acquiring staff, so it helps to have someone looking out for her.”

“Even if I didn’t, Ellie and Ruka would. Most importantly, now I get to eat food made by the two of them.”

“Mel, you...” *She sure knows her priorities. Or is she just hiding her embarrassment?*



::My king...Ruka's handmade cooking!:: moaned Gerard with a voice that sounded like he was crying tears of blood.

All right, all right! I'll lift your house arrest before dinner!

::MY KING!::

I thought I felt Gerard's loyalty climb another notch.



Dinner went by as a boisterous affair, just as it always did. But we had a fairly important event lined up for four days later. The contents of the letter I had quickly scanned could be summed up in three points:

I had passed my promotion exam.

The official promotion ceremony would be held at the Adventurer's Guild in Parth in four days.

After the ceremony, there would be a practice match between the new Rank S adventurer (me) and an incumbent Rank S adventurer.

I didn't particularly mind, but the third point was quite sudden. So, I'm *the entertainment at my own celebration?*

Side Story 1: The Battle Junkie's Little Sister

I slowly awoke to gentle sunlight shining through my fluttering curtains. As always, this was a process that would take a while, as I wasn't all that good at getting up in the morning.

"Arf!" (Rion, it's morning.)

"Give me...five more minutes..."

"Arf! Arf!" (Goodness, there you go again with that same old line.)

Even before sunrise, Efil would already be up and cooking so that we could start the day with a wonderful hot breakfast. Despite being so bad with mornings, the reason I was able to consistently make it to the dining table in time was my wonderful partner, Alex. I wasn't nearly as bad as Melfina, but I still needed occasional help with escaping the fiendish clutches of my warm and fluffy bed.

Even today, Alex was holding the collar of my Efil-made pajamas in his mouth and straining to pull me out of the territory of the devil. *Wait, no, you're going to ruin my pajamas if you pull any harder. I'll wake up. I'm up already!*

"Fwaaah...good morning, Alex."

"Arf!" (Morning.)

Gently rubbing my eyes, which were still desperate to close for more sleep, I turned to greet the shadow wolf, who had plonked down onto the mattress. *Farewell, my beloved bed. Good morning, new day.*

"By the way, can't you wake me up in a less aggressive way? Say, how Efil-nee wakes Kel-nii up."

"Arf..." (How do you expect me to do something so skillful?)

"Ahaha, never mind, I was just asking."

At least it was better than being woken up by Ruka, whose go-to strategy was belly-flopping onto the bed. I'd had it happen to me once when I'd overslept, and to my surprise, it had turned out much more painful than I could have imagined. After learning that, I couldn't help but feel sorry for the dads in manga and anime having to suffer through it when they just wanted to get a bit more rest on their days off.

That said, there was the occasional boss who wouldn't wake up even after such an attack — Melfina being a perfect example — but I suppose there were exceptions to everything.

I changed out of my pajamas and into casual wear, then brushed

out my messy bed hair. Around the time I was done, a wonderful smell came out of nowhere and tickled my nose.

“Mmm, today’s breakfast is...oh, it’s grilled fish!”

Efil’s cooking was suuuuuper delicious, but it was kind of troubling how it always made me unconsciously start drooling. If I let my guard down because I’d only just woken up, I might end up exposing my slovenly side to Kelvin.

Pull yourself together, me! Stay on your toes! While staring at my face in the mirror, I slapped my cheeks to psych myself up.

“Arf?” (You still half-asleep?)

“Ahaha, maybe...”

I had accidentally slapped myself a bit too hard. I rubbed my tingling cheeks as I stepped out into the corridor with Alex.

As we descended the main staircase, we happened to bump into Ruka, who was in the middle of wiping the balustrades. Although she was supposedly still an apprentice, to my eyes, the speed at which she was completing her morning tasks was already worthy of the title of a proper maid.

“Ah, Rion-sama! Good morning!”

“Morning, Ruka-chan.”

“And good morning to you too, Alex. Your fur’s as wonderful as ever, even though you’ve just woken up,” Ruka said, rubbing Alex’s head as he crooned softly with his eyes closed blissfully.

“Maybe it’s because I brush him so carefully every day,” I said.

“Arf...” (Your brushing really is addictive...)

“Aww, hearing that makes me happy.”

“Ahaha, I’ve got no idea what he just said. Oh, right, Rion-sama, you haven’t had your breakfast yet! Shouldn’t you hurry?”

“Oh, I forgot! Let’s go, Alex!”

After exchanging a promise to play together later, I parted with Ruka, and the shadow wolf and I headed for our destination: the dining room.

But...hold on. “Alex, my hair isn’t weird, is it? Did I get all the bed hair straightened out?”

“Arf. Aaaarf.” (You look as cute as ever. Let’s go have breakfast already.)

Jeez, Alex still has a ways to go before understanding how a girl’s heart works. But...so, I’m cute, huh? Ehehe...

“All right!” I pushed the door open forcefully and called in a cheerful voice, “Good morning, everyone!”

Kelvin, Sera, and Gramps sat at the dining table. Thankfully, breakfast hadn’t started yet. The rhythmic sound of a knife on a cutting board and the bubbling of a boiling pot could be heard from the attached kitchen.

Is Efil-nee still in the middle of cooking?

“Hey there, Rion. Glad to see you so energetic this morning.”

“It is gladdening indeed, my king. It makes me feel invigorated as well. Come now, let me reciprocate in kind. I’ll use my diaphragm to —”

“Stop that. You’ll break the windows,” warned Kelvin.

I can also see the windows breaking for real. Gramps is just that powerful, after all.

“Looks like you didn’t oversleep today. Good on you for managing to avoid Ruka’s belly flop,” joked Sera with an elbow on the table. She had the bearing of a mature older sister, but the smile on her face seemed tinged with a certain innocence as well. It was such a beautiful smile that even I thought I would fall for her.

The thing is, someone who didn’t know Sera well enough might think she was one to just do whatever she wanted, but she was much stricter than me when it came to sleeping well and waking early. She also knew a ton of manners that I didn’t, and the contrast with her usual simple personality would sometimes catch me off guard. In short, she was both very pretty and also really cute.

“It’s no laughing matter, Sera-nee. And I don’t oversleep that much in the first place!” *Only as much as the average person my age, I’m sure!*

“Arf?” (Wait, you’re not at all self-aware?)

“Look at that. Seems like you’ve been betrayed by Alex.”

“Aleeeex!”

“Hahaha, well, grab a seat,” laughed Kelvin. “Breakfast should be ready any time now. Come on, Alex, you settle down too.”

“Arf!” (Okay!)

“Jeez! You be thankful to Kel-nii for stepping in, all right?”

After chiding him, I pulled myself together. Although our seating arrangement wasn’t set in stone, I had gotten used to sitting next to Kelvin at the table. Alex forcibly pushed his big body under my chair and put his head on his paws, waiting for food, and yawned. *You sure are easygoing. Look, Efil-nee is already pushing her serving cart over.*

“Thank you for waiting, everyone. Oh, good morning, Rion-sama. Looks like it’s an early day for you.”

“How could you say that, Efil-nee?!”

I knew without a doubt that she didn’t have any ill will, but I was quite sensitive to those words at the moment. *Let’s learn to get up by ourselves in the morning. Yep, let’s definitely do that.*



“Thank you for the food.”

I put my hands together and gave thanks for the delicious meal.

Today, too, I'd managed to finish even the last grain of rice. That was something I wouldn't even have imagined in my past life. *Healthiness really is the most important thing.*

"What's everyone planning on doing today?"

After I'd helped Efil to put away the plates and cutlery, we had time for a short breather. I was the last one to finish eating, and Kelvin and Sera were already drinking their after-meal coffee. Gramps was in the green tea camp. Then, during the night, all of them would be part of the alcohol camp. The amount they drank worried me sometimes.

"I was challenged to a revenge match by Sera. I'll be going downstairs to beat her at her own game soon."

"Beat me at my own game?! You sure know how to talk big! During our last practice session, you didn't win by much of a margin! Today is not going to be the same as before!"

"I recall you saying those exact same words last time."

"You remember wrong! I can totally beat you using Jin Scrimmage on only one arm, just wait!"

"Sure you can."

"You're doubting me, aren't you?! I can tell; you totally are!"

Ah, the two of them have started arguing again. The mature Sera from a moment before had gone out on a journey, and the inner Sera had emerged. I could swear Gramps enjoyed egging her on.

Kelvin turned to me. "What about you, Rion? Will you be heading to the training room with them?"

"Hmm..."

Gramps's and Sera's power levels were, at the end of the day, rather similar. Unfortunately, Alex and I weren't quite there yet. Even if we were to join in, we'd only be getting in the way.

"Nuh-uh, I'm thinking of hitting the town with Alex."

However, that was only for now. Not a day went by where we were slacking off. *We'll catch up to them one day!*

"Whoa, look at Gerard's motivation just draining right out of him."

"What?"

"So, Rion isn't coming to watch..."

"Hold on, you're not going to go easy on me just because of that, are you?!"

"Oh, uh,ahaha..."

"Arf." (He looks really dispirited.)

Gramps's head and shoulders were drooping so low that it was as if he had witnessed the end of the world. *Um, should I go watch their match after all?*

While rubbing the shoulder part of the knight's armor — it

cheered him back up right away — I turned towards my brother, who was looking on with amusement, and asked, “What’ll *you* be doing, Kel-nii?”

“Me? I’m going out to buy something with Efil. But before that...” He looked up at the ceiling, prompting me to follow suit. “I think it’s about time I went to wake up Melfina.”

“Oh, right. You should probably do that, yeah.”

If left alone, she was likely to sleep until lunchtime.



“...and that’s how everybody was treating me. Isn’t that terrible? I can wake up by myself if I really want to!”

“Looks like you’re having a pretty tough time of it so soon after the house moving, Rion-chan. Oh, hold on. You only arrived in Parth *after* Kel-chan and the rest moved, didn’t you?”

In the middle of my morning walk with Alex, we’d dropped by the Fairy’s Song, the inn where Kelvin had lived when he’d first come to town. I had ordered two servings of milk and was now sitting at one of the counter seats, talking with the proprietress, Clare.

Milk really was the best drink in the mornings, and this was actually my second glass of the day. The benefits to my height and chest that I’d been hoping for all those years had yet to manifest, but...

I’m sure that if I simply keep at it, one day I’ll definitely get Sera-nee’s figure!

“Arf, arf. Arf.” (In that case, I won’t wake you up anymore. Let’s see how you do tomorrow morning.)

“You won’t w— remember how we were taught that in battle, changing circumstances require flexibility? I mean, we wouldn’t want to trouble Efil-nee, would we?”

“Arf?” (Whatever do you mean?)

“It looks like you’re actually conversing with Alex, Rion-chan. Seeing you two get along so well makes me happy.”

We don’t only look like we’re talking, we actually are...

“In any case, although you might encounter various hiccups living with Kelvin and his friends, what with all of them having such colorful personalities, they really are great people. Of that, I can assure you.”

“Mm, don’t worry. I trust Kel-nii and the others from the bottom of my heart. What I was saying now was, um, just me letting off steam, really.”

“Hahaha, as Kel-chan’s little sister, it seems you didn’t need that reminder after all. Then again, it makes sense that you understand him even better than I do. Here you go, have another glass on the house. Drink up!”

“Aww, thank you!”

The extra serving of milk was a bit much for me and my rather small appetite. However, I couldn't turn down Clare's generosity, so I did my best and managed to finish it somehow.

I loved my occasional visits with Clare. Talking to her made me feel warm and relaxed, almost as if she were my mother. Sometimes, I'd get the same feeling talking to Efil, too.

At this time of day, most customers coming to the inn for breakfast had already left, leaving the tavern fairly empty and Clare generally free. Maybe I shouldn't say it, as she was running a business there, but I loved being able to have her all to myself for a while.

“Hey, I'm back!”

Oh, there I was talking about how there aren't many customers, and now one's come in. Wait, but that voice...

“Oh, it's you. Welcome back, I guess.”

“What's with the lack of enthusiasm?!”

“Good day, Clare-san!”

“Good day, Clare-san!”

“Good day, Clare-san!”

It was Uld and his party members. I remembered meeting them before at Sangria Forest. All of them had bulky muscles that were noticeable even underneath their armor. According to Gramps, however, I was much, much stronger than them from a physical standpoint. *How exactly is all that strength packed into my thin arms? I guess this world's just a mysterious place.*

“That's a pretty big group you've got today. Is that boy a new member?”

“Oho, there's Clare-san for you; she notices things quickly!” laughed the archer.

As Clare had noted, there was indeed a boy who was almost hidden behind Uld and the others' hulking forms. Judging from his appearance, he was slightly older than me, which placed him around Efil's age. He was shouldering an iron axe and had a pretty solid build himself. His expression was kind of sullen, though.

“This guy is a newcomer who registered at the guild just before Kelvin set off for Toraj. He's pretty talented, having managed to reach Rank D already. But he's got a difficult personality and was having trouble finding a party that would accept him.”

“Get off my back already! It's not that I couldn't find a party to accept me, it's that I couldn't find a party that suits me!” the boy interjected, turning his face to the side in a huff.

“And now you see what he's like. He was out of options, so we're taking him in temporarily. We'll be training him up until he finds a party he can get along with.”

“Our leader’s generosity never ceases to bring tears to my eyes...”

“You think I’ll just stand here letting you guys spin the story however you want?! In the first place, *you* were the ones who interrupted my attempts to solicit—”

“Hold on, is that Rion-chan I see?!”

“What?! You’re right!”

“Ahaha, good morning, Uld-san and everyone.”

The sight of the men all suddenly rushing towards me was, honestly, a little scary. For some reason, the boy who’d been sulking a moment before was also part of that group.

“Whooooaaa! Who’s this girl? Someone introduce me!”

“Ah, I see the troublesome part of his personality now,” sighed Clare from behind the counter.

The boy’s breathing was growing heavy as he brashly pushed his way closer and closer. *Ah, if you get any closer —*

“You idiot! Don’t you realize you’re scaring Rion-chan?! That’s not gentlemanly at all!”

“Dammit, let me go! Let! Me! Go!”

Having caught on, the archer and swordsman, both of whom had also been rushing towards me at top speed, held their younger companion back.

“Even so, I got her name! It’s Rion, right?! You there! I’ll allow you into my party!”

“Umm...”

“Kid, we give you kudos for having the guts to solicit her even under such circumstances. That mental fortitude, at least, I’d like a portion of.”

“Like I give a fuck about that! Let me go right now!”

“But at the same time, you also have terrible tunnel vision. Take a better look in front of you.”

The boy, who was still being held down, looked around my seat. “Front? The hell you talk—”

“Grrrrrr...”

Alex was at my side, now in full battle mode. His low growl and raised hackles made it clear that he had no intention of letting the teenager take another step towards me.

“A sh...shadow wolf?”

“That’s right, kid. If you plan on making it as an adventurer, you *have* to learn to differentiate between opponents you can beat and those you can’t with a single glance. If it isn’t clear, this shadow wolf is in the category of those you should never, ever raise a hand against. If those two hadn’t stopped you, you’d be mincemeat by now.”

“Oh, come on, Alex wouldn’t go that far. Right, Alex?”

Although the wolf was my partner, Kelvin would also give him

orders from time to time. *Jeez, everyone worries about me too much. But it makes me happy, so, oh well!*

“Phew. Wouldn’t go ‘that far,’ huh? You sure are keeping a scary pet, Rion-chan.”

“Alex is not a pet! He’s family. We even sleep together at night. Isn’t that right, Alex?”

“Arf!” (Mhm.)

“Seriously?! You’ve got guts, Rion-chan.”

Um, I don’t think there’s any particular need for guts here. Alex’s fur is super fluffy, and I sleep very soundly when hugging him.

“The, uh, shadow wolf aside, I haven’t given up just yet! This is surely a one-in-a-million opportunity. Judging from the sword at your waist, you’re no ordinary person! Furthermore, your exemplary facial features make you highly suitable as my ideal woman!” claimed the boy, pointing a finger at me.

As I was struggling to come up with an appropriate response, a reliable voice spoke up behind me. “Sorry to interrupt the fun and games, but can you give me your orders already?”

“Read the atmosphere a little, won’t you, old hag! I don’t have time for you right now!”

“Shut up, you brat!”

“Shut up, you brat!”

“Shut up, you brat!”

“Shut up, you brat!”

To my astonishment, Uld-san and his party members all harmonized by saying the exact same thing at the exact same time.

“Was...that a joke just now?”

“Eek!”

Although there was no sound, one could almost imagine there was a threatening rumbling noise coming from behind Clare.

“Clare-san, one mug of ale for me!”

“My usual. Large, please!”

“I’d like ‘currae’ from the hidden menu! Kid, you order too, quickly!”

“Uh, umm...then, a boar dish, if you have one on the menu?”

“Clare, I’ll have —”

“You pay back your tab first.”

“You’re charging me even though this is my home too?!”

Even the most veteran adventurers in Parth didn’t dare go against Clare. All of them meekly did an about-face and settled themselves at a table. The younger boy seemed reluctant, but followed suit all the same.

“You guys calm down a bit, all right? Well, it’s going to take me a while to cook everything. In the meantime, hup!”

With a slight heave, Clare brought out a rather thick and sturdy round table. She plonked it down beside the men and a tremor ran through the floor.

“What is this?”

“This table of ours has withstood quite a number of arm wrestling matches between adventurers wanting to prove their strength. If you want to solicit Rion-chan, kid, it’s only fair that you prove yourself first, right? All right, I’m off to the kitchen now. Honey, you handle the rest.”

“Handle the r— what?!”

Ahaha, Uld-san looks so flustered. Anyway, I have to arm wrestle now, is that it?

“Ha...hahaha...I see, I see! So, the old hag meant that I should beat this girl in an arm wrestling match to prove my strength to her? Turns out she gets me after all!” The boy radiated motivation as his eyes took on a confident gleam.

“Dude, is Rion-chan going to be okay? We’re letting this happen?”

“How would I know? In times like these, it’s our wonderful and reliable party leader we turn to, isn’t it?”

“You guys are dumping it back on me now? Just what is Clare thinking? Rion-chan, if you don’t want to do this, you can just say no.”

“Nah, it’s fine. I don’t mind. Let’s do it, then. Arm wrestling.”

“Whaaat?!”

“Whaaat?!”

“Whaaat?!”

“Whaaat?!”

Oh hey, they harmonized again. I guess they’re just that close.

I stepped up onto a stool — because I wasn’t tall enough — and rested my right elbow on the table, then announced that I was ready.

“Arf?” (Don’t forget to go easy on him.)

“It’ll be fine. You’re such a worrywart sometimes, Alex.”

“Even your wolf is worrying about you? Rest assured, I’m a gentleman. I won’t hurt you!”

“Uh, thank you?” *Is it just me, or did he completely misunderstand my exchange with Alex?*

“Dude, is Rion-chan strong? Even though she looks so dainty?”

“Seriously, bro, don’t ask me! I wouldn’t know! But considering whose sister she is...”

“Can everyone on the sidelines be quiet for a second? Rion-chan and I are about to have a moment.”

Okay, that’s a bit annoying.

Uld sighed. “There you go, getting all full of yourself again. In any case, both sides have expressed consent, so it’s not my place to say

anything. Are you two ready to start?"

The boy and I held each other's hands on top of the table in an arm wrestling pose. The only thing now was to wait for the starting signal. *His hands seem a bit sweaty... I guess it just shows how eager he is to win?*

"I'm good to start whenever," I confirmed.

"And so am I. Hahaha, this is where my rose-colored life as an adventurer begins!" my opponent crowed.

Uld brought a hand to his forehead. "Seriously, you...ugh, never mind. All right, here goes. Ready..."

I tightened my grip a little.

"Go!"

But even after the signal, I couldn't feel the boy exerting any strength or making any effort to push my arm down. *What's he doing?*

"It's...already started, you know."

"I know, all right! But it'd be boring if I clinched a win right out of the gate, so I'm thinking of giving you some time to shine. Don't worry about me; go ahead and push my arm down!"

"If you say so." *This is technically supposed to be a serious face-off, so I don't like that he's making light of me. Well, let's just take him up on his offer, then.*

I began applying my strength, ramping it up slowly in small increments.

"Oho, looks like you're pretty good for a girl. I knew I had an eye for strong people. But this isn't enough to — uh, wait, hold on, hold on. Just how are your tiny arms exerting so much strength?! This — no, shit, wait, noooooooooo!"

Thud.

"Yay, I win."

The boy's soulful howl rang emptily as the back of his hand hit the table. I had done my best to match his strength so as to give him a fighting chance, but he had completely frozen, as if his soul had left his body. *Um, he's not hurt, is he? I thought I was pretty gentle...*

"How could this be? I was the strongest guy back in my village...and yet I've lost to a girl? Is this a nightmare? I must be dreaming..."

"*Arf, arrrf...*" (Poor child, looks like he took some real mental damage.)

Umm, was that because of me?

"Damn, Rion-chan's so strong! From the look of it, you weren't even going all-out, were you?"

"She's Kelvin's little sister, all right! Anyone who gets taken in by her sweet appearance is in for a bad time. Just saying, but I saw through her ability from the start!"

“Like hell you did. Granted, it’s hard to read the intentions of someone who isn’t emanating any hostility. To be honest, even I hadn’t expected you to be so talented, Rion-chan.”

“Don’t let this get you down too much, young man. Our party leader is saying this shit to look cool, but he himself previously underestimated Efil-chan’s strength and got himself finished off in a split second. Compared to that, you got off rather easily.”

“There you go bringing up uncalled-for episodes from long ago— Hold on, young man?”

The boy was trembling furiously. Uld placed a hand on his shoulder, calling out to him again with concern.

What’s happening?

“Kel...Kelvin’s little sister...?! You...you’re *that* Kelvin’s sibling?!?!”

“I assume the Kelvin you’re referring to is my big brother, but —”

“NOOOOOOO!” The boy let out a weird screech as he dashed out of the Fairy’s Song.

What on earth was that?!

“Oh, right, I forgot. That guy has a severe case of Kelvinphobia.”

“Well, it’s hard to blame him, having been hit with so much bloodlust during their first encounter.”

“Of course, like every other time, it was entirely his own fault.”

Kel-nii, what on earth did you do?!

“Here’s the boar di— Hey, where’s the kid?” Clare asked, presenting a scrumptious-looking platter. But the one who had ordered it was no longer there.

“Uh...off to banish some mental demons.”

Alex ate the dish later with great gusto.



Normally, I would have been fast asleep at this hour of the night, and Alex was already snoring peacefully, all curled up. Tonight, however, I was in ninja mode. *Lower my waist, bend my knees. Tip-toe, tip-toe, tippy-toe. Here I am at Kel-nii’s room!*

“Pardon the intrusion,” I mouthed silently as I quietly opened the door. *All right, he’s asleep.* Sneaking into my big brother’s bed while he’s sleeping is part of the fundamentals of being a little sister. According to the manga I’d read, it could even be said that this was the most basic talent all little sisters should possess. So it followed that, in order to properly fulfill my role, I had to follow the wisdom of the ancients and sneak into Kelvin’s bed.

Sneakily, sneakily...

Upon safely reaching the bed, I wasted no time burrowing in. *Uh-oh, the base has turned into a territory of the devil from Kel-nii’s body warmth!* This was a grave situation for me, as I was already being

assaulted by waves of sleepiness. Even so, I obstinately pushed my way under the blanket.

As a result of my dogged persistence, I finally spotted the light at the end of the tunnel. My head popped out from the other end and was bathed in cool air.

“Ehehe, I’ve made it.”

When I looked next to me, there was Kelvin’s sleeping face up close. *So, this is the thing called “siblings sleeping together,” done by families through the ages. It’s got my heart racing quite a bit more than I’d imagined.*

In order not to wake him up, I spoke in a super soft voice. “Listen, listen, Kel-nii. So much happened to me today, you wouldn’t believe it! I chatted so much with Clare-san, then I also met the newest member of Uld-san’s party...”

I reported everything that had happened that day, almost as if recording a journal. I shared absolutely everything — thoughts that I had, places I’d visited, chapters that had been added to my book of experiences — with this beloved brother of mine, he who had brought me to this wonderful world and welcomed me with open arms.

“Today was so...much fun...I hope...that...tomor...zzz...”

Before I knew it, I had fallen asleep, my heart filled to bursting with warmth and affection.





I waited for a while after Rion had gone quiet and was breathing peacefully before finally opening my eyes.

You think she's fallen asleep?

::Seems so.::

Just in case, I used the Network to confirm with Efil, who was on my other side, before turning to look at our cute little intruder. She was deep in slumber, and her face was filled with peace and reassurance.

I got my guard up when I sensed someone stealthily moving across the room, but it was just Rion in the end.

::She didn't seem to notice me at all. She only had eyes for you, Master.::

That, or she was so sleepy she had tunnel vision. Anyway, sneaking into my bed is quite the bold move. Is it just me, or is this completely beyond the boundaries of what siblings do together? Is it normal for little sisters to do this? What do you think, Efil?

::Unfortunately, I've never had a little sister myself, so I cannot say for certain. However, Rion-sama did, in fact, just do so. Does that not mean it is simply how things are?::

So, you're saying it is a little sister-like thing to do?

::I am only speaking based on my observations.::

I wasn't quite convinced, but reminded myself that perhaps this sort of behavior was indeed the norm for this world. Efil and I took another look at Rion's sleeping face.

"Aww, so cute..."

"Aww, so cute..."

The two of us inadvertently ended up harmonizing. Seeing how blissful my little sister looked convinced me to stop stressing over such minor concerns.

All right, let's do this. It's normal for little sisters to do so! It's normal for little sisters to do so! It's normal for little sisters to do so!

::So, it is normal?::

Say it with me! It's normal for little sisters to do so!

::I-It's normal for little sisters to do so! Ah...I think I'm starting to consider it normal as well.::

I knew it. Isn't it strange how that works?

Although we had worked ourselves up into a bit of a weird late-night mood, I wasn't bothered. That said, it was about time I got some rest, as I was quite sleepy myself. After using the Network to say goodnight to both Efil and the sleeping Rion, I closed my eyes once again.

Here's hoping tomorrow turns out to be another wonderful day, Rion. Oh, and maybe I should keep an eye on that boy you mentioned. He sounded extremely rude. If I see him...zzz...

Side Story 2: To Each Their Cooking

This is an incident that took place some time after we had grown used to our new home and welcomed the newest additions to our party. Gerard and I had returned from a monster subjugation, and my stomach was telling me it was fast approaching noon.

“I feel like it’s been a while since you and I went somewhere on our own, my king.”

“I know, right? Even though as a party we have such good synergy with you up front and me in the back providing support...then again, the rest of our companions are all too talented at everything, so I suppose that’s why we never get the chance anymore.”

“I have a feeling it’s not so much *that* and more that it’s nigh impossible to get a spot next to y— hold on.” Gerard, who had been walking next to me, suddenly stopped in his tracks.

“What’s wrong?”

“I don’t smell anything.”

“Smell?”

“Normally, this time before lunch, the entire mansion would be filled with the wonderful smell of cooking. At the moment, however, I can’t smell a thing.”

“Now that you mention it...” *Your senses sure are sharp, in spite of being covered head-to-toe in heavy armor.*

I focused my senses and also sniffed the air. It was true, the usual mouthwatering fragrances of Efil’s cooking were absent. *Is she out? Considering how diligent she is, I can hardly imagine her forgetting to prepare lunch.*

“Could it be she’s gotten sick?” I gasped. “What if she’s collapsed?!”

“What?!”

“And we warned her so many times to be mindful of her own health, that stubborn girl!”

Recently, it seemed like Efil had regained quite a bit of breathing room after entrusting some of the cooking and housework to Ellie and Ruka, but perhaps I had been a bit optimistic. Even now, she would go to sleep after me and wake up earlier than anyone else. It wouldn’t surprise me to learn that she’d been putting in undue effort in ways I didn’t even know about.

“Efil, are you all right?! I’ll heal you with magic now!”

“Want me to cook you my special gruel, lass?!”

The two of us rushed towards the kitchen, where we thought her most likely to be. I was completely flustered, wondering what I’d do if I really found her on the ground. *I’m counting on you, Nerves of Steel!*

But the scene that greeted us was quite different from what we’d been expecting.

“What are you two doing?”

Sera was standing there in an apron, an egg held in one hand. She was looking at *us* with a worried face. Having heard the commotion, the other girls emerged from the kitchen. Efil was part of that group.

“We...were practicing emergency evacuation procedures. Right, Gerard?”

“That doesn’t explain my offer to make gruel, my king.”

Umm, then how about us being the ones in need of help due to our minds being thrown into confusion by a state of emergency? No? Too much of a stretch?

“Gruel? Oh, are you cooking too, Gerard?” Sera asked.

Gerard and I exchanged glances, then asked at the same time, “Too?”

“It’s been decided that we’ll all be making our own recipes today,” Rion explained. “We’ve been relying on Efil-nee this whole time, so we started discussing the idea of doing our own cooking every once in a while. Then things sort of snowballed from there...”

“Long story short, we’re challenging Efil!” Sera interjected. Then, for extra effect, she said it again. “It’s a challenge!”

Melfina pounded her chest confidently. “After all, I am a girl myself. This time, I am on the cooking side, not the eating side. Just wait till I steal your heart with my food, honey!”

“And there you have it,” Efil concluded. “Master, please be our judge. As your maid, there is no way I am losing this competition! Gerard-san, feel free to participate as well!”

“I’m sorry. You girls have lost me.”

With some effort, I managed to calm everyone down and obtain a more detailed account of the situation. In short, what had happened was this:

Efil was preparing lunch. Rion expressed an interest in cooking. Sera claimed that she could cook too. Aside from Efil, she probably *was* the best cook...maybe. Melfina couldn’t stand being misunderstood as someone belonging solely to the “eating” side. She, too, was capable of something *as easy as cooking*. Efil took offense at the phrase “as easy as cooking” and demanded she take it back. Then, somewhere along the line, it broke out into an official cooking competition.

That said, my summary is a bit dramatized. What had actually

taken place was much less serious than that, and more about just having fun.

“That sounds like an interesting contest,” Gerard chuckled.

“Some of the participants do have me worried, though,” I replied with a sigh.

In the end, Gerard and I folded in the face of the girls’ enthusiasm and agreed to judge their work. The knight was looking on with enjoyment, but truthfully, I was afraid to imagine what would end up being served. *I know I don’t have to worry about Efil’s cooking. In fact, I want to eat that. Rion’s is probably going to be okay as well. Actually, I’m quite looking forward to it.*

“Mel, did you hear what Kelvin said about you?”

“Those worries of his are about you, Sera.”

It’s BOTH of you I’m worried about. Even if you’re going to fail, please, please, please keep it within the realm of “it tastes bad.”

“All right, before you all begin, a quick explanation of how things are going to go. Once a dish is finished, Gerard and I will judge it in turn. It is now lunchtime, and we are hungry. But even so, keep the quantities down to reasonable amounts, or else we won’t be able to finish eating everyone’s entries. There’s no set time limit, but don’t take too long. Once we’re done tasting everyone’s food, we’ll announce the one that was most delicious. Any questions? None? In that case, go!”

I clapped my hands once and everyone flew into action. *Let’s switch to using the Network for my conversations with Gerard from this point on. As judges, we wouldn’t want to unduly influence the competitors with our comments.*

Chop, chop, chop.

Gerard and I could have waited in the dining room, but we wanted to watch for a bit. The girls were concentrating on their cooking with razor-sharp focus, nobody uttering a word. *Uh, are they actually serious about this? Was I wrong? Could it be they all do have significant experience with cooking?*

I glanced at Gerard. *This sight...seems a lot more normal than I’d imagined.*

::What did you expect, my king?::

I dunno. Maybe Mel and Sera skewering ingredients with spears or chopping using knifehand strikes instead of actual knives?

::Ahhh...well, I suppose it’s a relief that they’re doing it normally::

So true. I’m starting to think I might actually allow myself to have expectations here.

As I heaved a sigh of relief, the first contestant to finish raised her hand.

“I’m done!”

It was Rion in her cute pink apron. She hopped up and down to make up for her shorter stature in an attempt to grab our attention.

"That was quick. You sure you don't need more time?" I asked.

"Well, I don't know any complicated recipes. This is simple, but I did my best making it!"

"So, you went with rolled omelet. Interesting choice," Gerard murmured.

Rion's dish appeared a bit untidy, probably due to her having messed up a bit during the rolling process. Even so, we both thought it a treat as she had worked hard to make it for us. *Let us partake with joy!*

"Heaven be thanked, heaven be thanked..."

"Gerard, stop worshipping it and start eating already."

"Right, a dish like this is best enjoyed hot. Here goes..."

We both took a bite.

"H-How is it?" Rion asked hesitantly.

I nodded. "Mm, not bad at all. It has a sweet and homey flavor that makes me feel nostalgic somehow. The presentation isn't perfect, but the taste more than makes up for it. If this was put into our lunchboxes in the future, I'd be the first to eat it."

"Aww, really? Yay!"

"I...think I can die happy now..."

"Gramps?!"

Phew, that was close. Gerard was this close to going to heaven. Too much enjoyment can be dangerous; lesson learned. Objectively speaking, Rion's rolled omelet is only delicious in the "anyone can make it" sense. However, after taking into account our biased grading curve for our "grandchild" and "little sister," she still had a fighting chance in the competition.

"Looks like I'm next!"

The second to raise her hand and bring a plate over was Sera, who was wearing a red apron that did nothing to obfuscate her womanly curves. To my surprise, the dish she was holding emanated a wonderful fragrance that immediately kicked my salivary glands into action. It was...

"Demon-style curry. Enjoy!"

"Uhh...no, this is clearly meat and potato stew."

"Really? But I've been eating this ever since I was small..."

At the very least, whatever it is, it isn't curry. Or could it be that in the demon world, "meat and potato stew" is called "curry"?

"My king, what does it matter what it's called if it's delicious?"

"That is...deeply profound." *I suppose there's no need to dwell on mere details. This is another world, after all, so it shouldn't be surprising for names of dishes to be passed down incorrectly. What truly matters is*

the taste. It's all about the taste! I'm still recovering from the surprise of her betraying my expectations and making something that actually looks good!

"Both the appearance and smell seem perfect. Sera, have you been practicing in secret?"

"What? No, this is my first time ever cooking."

"Uh...come again?"

"I knew how to make it, but today is my first time actually trying my hand at it. I pretty much just did it by intuition!"

Is there anything your intuition can't do?! I mean, I know you're proficient at a bunch of different things, but never did I imagine you being this good at cooking too. But hold on, before I make a judgment call, I have to actually eat it. Who knows, there might still be a chance that it's not what it seems. So...here we go.

I took a bite, then my eyes flew wide open. "This is delicious!!" *What the hell is this?! This dish has flavor with such a kick that it'd put any run-of-the-mill restaurant to shame! Both the meat and potato are melting in my mouth. Is this really her first time cooking?!*

"I thought I had developed quite the refined palate because of Efil's cooking, but...this is one recipe I can definitely stand behind."

"Muahaha, so both of you like it! But sadly, I couldn't get it to the level where it'd make you cry like Efil's food does."

"Okay, that is literally the highest degree of evaluation, all right?"

No matter how much of a genius Sera was, it was no simple matter trying to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Efil, who not only possessed exceptional talent but also poured in unmeasurable effort. To do so would likely require the resolve to actually walk the path of a chef.

Even so, this was a happy miscalculation. *Sera, allow me to honestly give you praise. Well done!*

"And now it's my turn, Mas—"

"STOOOP RIGHT THERE!"

"Wh-What?!"

Just as Efil was about to present her dish, a voice rang out that froze her in her tracks. The source of the shout was not from within the room. It came from outside.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! And now, it's time for the dark horse to make her entrance! I also challenge you, Efil-chan!"

The voice outside the window turned out to be Ange's. She had apparently been in her mysterious stealth mode the entire time, waiting for this very moment. Just like Efil, she was wearing a green apro— No, she was wearing an apron with green military camouflage.

Paying no attention to Efil's slack-jawed surprise, she easily vaulted through the window and into the room.

"Hey there, Ange. Why'd you come in that way?"

“Tsk, tsk. Do you even have to ask, Kelvin-kun? It was for the theatrics, of course,” she replied smugly, wagging a finger.

I wanted very much to question her extensively about how she’d known of this competition and been so thoroughly prepared. Naturally, I had not detected or sensed her at all beforehand. This was a complete surprise attack with no warning whatsoever.

“You really *must* be an adventurer, right, Ange?”

“This big sister has no idea what you’re talking about.” The only answer I got was a cheerful smile and a blatant attempt at giving me the slip.

Gerard spoke up then. “So, Ange. Does your being here mean that you also wish to participate in this competition?”

“That’s the Gerard-san I know. You sure do catch on quick. While Efil-chan and everyone else were working hard inside, I was working just as hard outside.”

“Why outside?”

“Because not all cooking is done indoors. At times, incorporating an outdoor feel might be exactly what is needed. So here you go. Try this.”

Ange pulled a huge pot seemingly out of nowhere and plonked it onto the table with a loud thud.

“Hm, you went with soup?” Gerard asked.

I peered inside. “I see quite a lot of mushrooms and vegetables...ah, so you stuck to using only ingredients that can be found outside, in keeping with the outdoors theme?”

“I procured everything myself! Every ingredient is fresh!”

“You sure went all out. Oh, I see some meat in there as well.” *At first glance, it looks like fish, but what meat is it? Oh, right, I have Analyze Ey—* “Wait, you used snake?!”

Even worse, judging from the name, it was a pretty vicious species. *Uh, did I hear her wrong, or did she say she’d procured all the ingredients herself?*

“Wow, you have a great eye, Kelvin. I did my best to take care of the scales and all, but you still figured it out with one look.”

“That’s, uh...ahem. Dude, rather than ‘outdoors’ being the theme, I think ‘survival’ would be more suitable.”

“Snake...I remember eating it quite often when I went on expeditions back in my day. It’s actually quite delicious, my king. Give it a try.”

That’s not it. That’s not what I was commenting on. The snake I can sort of accept, but never mind, let’s move on. “Ange, I’m asking for the third ti—”

“Now then, Kelvin-kun! Try it while it’s still hot!” she said, her eyes practically sparkling.

I had completely lost my timing. Gerard was already holding a spoon. With no choice, I proceeded to try a mouthful. *Slurp.*

“Hmm...”

“How is it? What d’you think?”

“It kind of tastes like freshwater fish. Yep, this is delicious. I guess it’s a brand-new taste?”

“Ahaha, I’ve heard that before, from someone else who was trying snake for the first time.”

“Mmm, this sure hits the spot!”

Having never tasted snake until then, I found myself at a loss for what to say. In contrast, Gerard was heartily wolfing it down. *Judging from Ange’s reaction, could it be that she’s purposely messing with me?*

“Even if you aren’t familiar with the taste, I’d like to ask the judges to take into consideration the fact that almost all the ingredients I used can be sourced locally, which means this dish has a cost that’s as close to zero as you’ll ever get. I’m a useful girl to have around during an emergency!”

Is it a requirement for all Adventurer’s Guild receptionists to be this capable? Granted, being able to whip up a meal even when there are no obvious ingredients on hand does sound quite helpful.

“Muahaha, I finally managed to get you back, Efil-chan.”

“That was a very good try, Ange-chan. However...” Trailing off, Efil lifted the silver cloche that was covering her dish. A dazzling light spilled out from it.

“This is me at my most serious.”



There was but a single person left standing in the kitchen: Efil, Head Maid Extraordinaire. She stood proudly in her maid uniform, an emerald clip adorning her golden hair, numerous bodies at her feet.

“For the record, we’re not dead. We’re still alive!”

The dish she’d presented had been so delicious that I thought I had died and gone to heaven. It was so overwhelming that I’d almost fainted. Only Gerard and I had actually tasted it, but the smell alone had been enough to cause Rion and everyone else to fall to their knees, unable to get back up. What Efil had made was no longer food; it was a weapon. I never thought I’d be on the verge of dying from how *good* something tasted.

“I’m glad you liked it.”

“Dammit, I *knew* I should have been on the eating side instead!” Melfina muttered in frustration, trying to pull herself upright in spite of her buckling knees.

Well, hey, you did pretty good holding yourself back today. Don’t think I didn’t notice your razor-sharp gaze every time a new dish was

carried our way.

“Ahaha, I guess I’m still no match for you, Efil-chan!”

“I guess there’s no need to even hear Kel-nii and Gramps’ pronouncement.”

“I suppose so. Congratulations on the win, Efil!”

Ange, Rion, and Sera backed down gracefully and admitted their loss. *With this big of a contrast, there’s really nothing to do but laugh. It was still far too early to challenge the final boss. Let’s take this time to praise and extol the goddess of cooking in our midst instead.*

“Hold on! There’s still my dish!” the blue-aproned Melfina protested. The only actual goddess of this world, she held out a plate even as her shoulders heaved up and down from the effort of standing. It looked like her knees were going to need a bit more time to recover.

“Mel...”

“Princess...”

Come on, an upset at this point of the game just isn’t possible, all right? I couldn’t say that out loud, though. I was still extremely worried, but I knew she had done her best. Not only with the cooking, but also with suppressing her appetite. Just as I’d done for the others, I needed to face her efforts head on.

“Gerard, I...will try her food first.”

“Hm, very well. Go ahead. I shall bear witness to your gallantry.”

The supportive knight at my side gave me a push in the back. *Thank you, Gerard. I think I feel courage welling up inside of me. After all...*

“Blergh...”

This dish doesn’t even look like food.

“H-Honey?!”

“Mel-nee, healing magic!”

“Right, I can — it’s not working?!”

“A healing obstruction debuff?!”

I miraculously managed to escape death thanks to Efil’s devoted nursing and the gruel that Gerard quickly whipped up. After they all got together and talked it out, it was decided that Gerard’s gruel would be awarded first place in the competition.

Afterword

Thank you so much for purchasing *Black Summoner 3: The Army of Monsters*. I am Doufu Mayoi, the author who is still struggling to write afterwords despite having grown quite familiar with the novelization process itself, what with this being the third one. To those who have picked up this book ever since its web novel days or since Volume 1, please accept my continued heartfelt gratitude for your support.

Well, well, here we are with Volume 3, which is scheduled for release right after the turning of the year. It is around this point in the story that the cast expands greatly, both with the addition of new companions and the introduction of key players in each country. This volume is the entirety of *Arc 3: Making a Name* from the web novel version. After powering through from Rank F to Rank A in the blink of an eye, Kelvin finally obtains the ticket for becoming a Rank S adventurer. However, things are not fated to go smoothly, and in the shadows lurks Trycen...at least, that's how I'd summarize what happens here. That said, what actually happens is pretty much the same as before: Kelvin and his family just doing whatever they want.

Speaking of Kelvin and his family, we have new characters making an appearance one after another in this volume. There is the cute little sister, Rion, Summoned by Kelvin as a Hero, who brightens her surroundings with her smiles and energy. As a valuable straight man to the hijinks of the family, she is a character who everyone else dotes on as the youngest member of the party. Gaining a new grandchild also leaves Gerard on cloud nine. However, Rion's battle strength is the real thing, and she has no qualms about slicing and dicing enemies alongside her partner, Alex. Like a knife through butter, without mercy, giving no quarter! And as a sibling of our beloved battle junkie, she naturally has her own "uniqueness" that sets her apart from the rest. In a way, she's the perfect Kelvin-killer. There's really not much that can be done about that; she's a little sister, after all.

Of course, we cannot forget the goddess who finally makes an appearance in person this volume, Melfina. At the start, she was just "Menu-san" and was little more than a guidance character. After acquiring a physical body, however, she just...even I don't know how she turned out this way. The contrast between her imposing and awe-inspiring appearance and her disappointing personal lifestyle is far too

great. It might be easy to forget sometimes, but she is the goddess of this world. Even now, she continues asserting her claim as Kelvin's official wife. The way she conducts herself, and what will happen when the religious fanatic (Colette) is thrown into the mix, will surely be a sight to see.

All right, it's about time to give up on this afterword. What, you think it's too short? Muahaha, I purposefully adjusted the number of pages in the main book so that I wouldn't have to write such a long afterword! Thank you, Overlap-sama! Yay!

With that, I hereby leave *Black Summoner* in everyone's warm hands, praying that we will meet again in the next volume.

Doufu Mayoi

■ KELVIN

■ 23 Y/O / MALE / HUMAN/

■ SUMMONER

■ LEVEL: 95

■ TITLE: MENTOR OF THE HEROES

■ HP: 967/967

MP: 6,000/6,000 (+4,000)

SUMMONING CLOTHO: MAX MP - 100

SUMMONING GERARD: MAX MP - 300

SUMMONING SERA: MAX MP -180

SUMMONING MEL (ARTIFICIAL BODY):

MAX MP -5

■ STRENGTH: 349 (+160)

■ ENDURANCE: 354 (+160)

■ AGILITY: 578

■ MAGIC: 1,175 (+160)

■ LUCK: 765

■ EQUIPMENT

BLACK DISASTER (RANK S)

STRENGTHENED MITHRIL DAGGER (RANK B)

SKILL EATER (RANK S)

ASTARTE'S EMBRACE (RANK S)

TAILORED BLACK LEATHER BOOTS (RANK C)

■ SKILLS

SWORD MASTERY (RANK C) SCYTHE MASTERY (RANK A)

SUMMONING (RANK S) [AVAILABLE SLOTS: 5]

GREEN MAGIC (RANK S) WHITE MAGIC (RANK S)

ANALYZE EYE (RANK S) PRESENCE SENSING (RANK B)

DANGER DETECTION (RANK B) CONCEALMENT (RANK S)

NERVES OF STEEL (RANK B) ARMY COMMAND (RANK B)

SMITHING (RANK S) SPIRIT (RANK S) IRON WALL (RANK B)

HERCULEAN STRENGTH (RANK B)

MAGIC ENHANCEMENT (RANK B)

DOUBLE GROWTH RATE

DOUBLE SKILL POINTS

EXPERIENCE SHARING

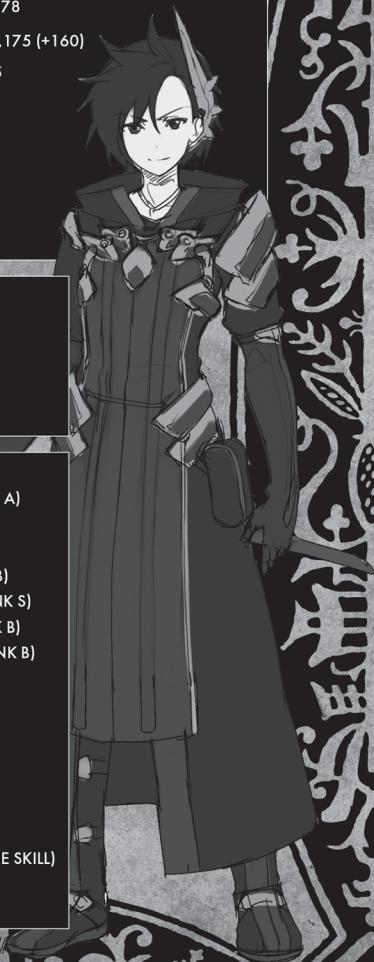
■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

BLESSING OF THE GODDESS OF REINCARNATION

SKILL EATER (RIGHT)/PARALLEL PROCESSING (UNIQUE SKILL)

SKILL EATER (LEFT)/GLUTTONY (UNIQUE SKILL)

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)



■ EFIL

■ 16 Y/O / FEMALE / HALF-ELF / BATTLE MAID

■ LEVEL: 93

■ TITLE: PERFECT MAID

■ HP: 744/744

■ MP: 1,415/1,415

■ STRENGTH: 375

■ ENDURANCE: 372

■ AGILITY: 1,424 (+640)

■ MAGIC: 918 (+160)

■ LUCK: 187

■ EQUIPMENT

PENUMBRA (RANK S)

MERCILESS (RANK S)

BATTLE MAID UNIFORM V (RANK S)

BATTLE MAID HEADDRESS V (RANK A)

MAGICAL JEWEL HAIR CLIP (RANK B)

SLAVE COLLAR (RANK D)

TAILORED LEATHER BOOTS (RANK C)

■ SKILLS

ARCHERY (RANK S)

RED MAGIC (RANK A)

FARSIGHT (RANK B)

COVERT ACTION (RANK A)

SERVICE (RANK A)

COOKING (RANK S)

SEWING (RANK S)

ACUTE REFLEXES (RANK S)

MAGIC ENHANCEMENT (RANK B)

DOUBLE GROWTH RATE

DOUBLE SKILL POINTS

■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

BLESSING OF THE FLAME DRAGON KING

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)



■ CLOTHO

■ 0 Y/O / GENDERLESS / SLIME GLUTTONIA

■ LEVEL: 94

■ TITLE: DEVOURER

■ HP: 1,674 / 1,674 (+100)

■ MP: 1,376 / 1,376 (+100)

■ STRENGTH: 940 (+100)

■ ENDURANCE: 1,018 (+100)

■ AGILITY: 861 (+100)

■ MAGIC: 870 (+100)

■ LUCK: 843 (+100)



■ EQUIPMENT

NONE

■ SKILLS

GLUTTONY (UNIQUE SKILL)

METALICIZE (RANK A)

ABSORPTION (RANK A)

DIVISION (RANK A)

DISMANTLE (RANK A)

STORAGE (RANK S)

BLUNT DAMAGE RESISTANCE

■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

SUMMONING/MAGIC SUPPLY (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)

■ GERARD

■ 138 Y/O / MALE / HADES KNIGHT CAPTAIN / DARK KNIGHT

■ LEVEL: 97

■ TITLE: PATRIOTIC GUARDIAN

■ HP: 3,880/3,880 (+1,890) (+100)

■ MP: 450/450 (+100)

■ STRENGTH: 1,199 (+320) (+100)

■ ENDURANCE: 1,237 (+320) (+100)

■ AGILITY: 413 (+100)

■ MAGIC: 307 (+100)

■ LUCK: 342 (+100)

■ EQUIPMENT

DEMON SWORD DAINSLEIF (RANK S)

DREADNOUGHT (RANK A)

CRIMSON MANTLE (RANK B)

■ SKILLS

LOYALTY (UNIQUE SKILL)

SELF MODIFICATION (UNIQUE SKILL)

SWORD MASTERY (RANK S)

DANGER DETECTION (RANK B)

MIND'S EYE (RANK S)

ARMORED SKIN (RANK A)

ARMY COMMAND (RANK A)

TEACHING (RANK B)

FORTITUDE (RANK A)

HERCULEAN STRENGTH (RANK A)

IRON WALL (RANK A)

MATERIALIZATION

DARK DAMAGE RESISTANCE

SLICING DAMAGE RESISTANCE

■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

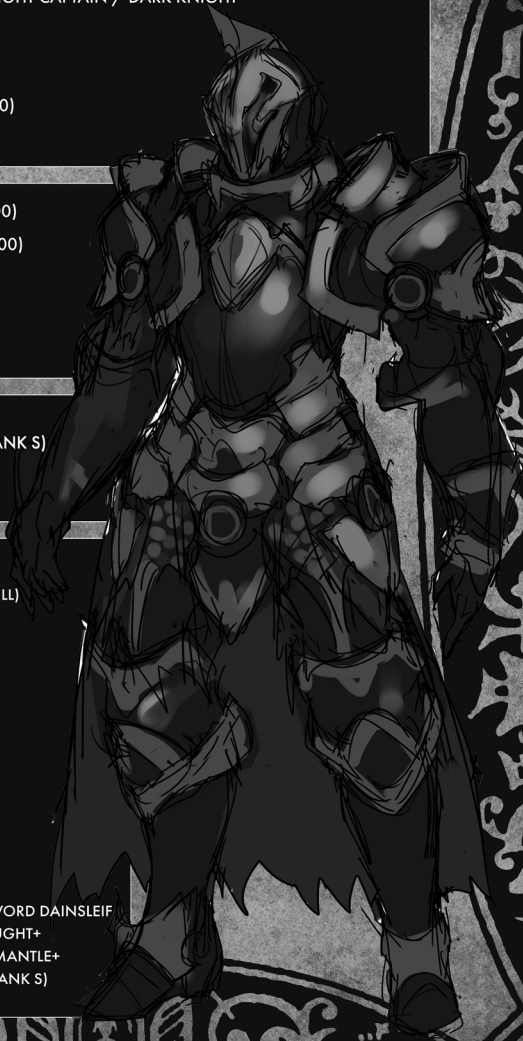
SELF MODIFICATION/DEMON SWORD DAINSLEIF

SELF MODIFICATION/DREADNOUGHT+

SELF MODIFICATION/CRIMSON MANTLE+

SUMMONING/MAGIC SUPPLY (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)



■ SERA

■ 21 Y/O / FEMALE / ARCHDEMON / CURSED PUGILIST

■ LEVEL: 95

■ TITLE: VANQUISHER OF THE GODDESS

■ HP: 1,295/1,295 (+100)

■ MP: 1,344/1,344 (+100)

■ STRENGTH: 702 (+100)

■ ENDURANCE: 614 (+100)

■ AGILITY: 699 (+100)

■ MAGIC: 726 (+100)

■ LUCK: 844 (+160) (+100)

■ EQUIPMENT

ARONDIGHT (RANK S)

QUEEN'S TERROR (RANK S)

CLIP OF CAMOUFLAGE (RANK A)

STRENGTHENED MITHRIL GREAVES (RANK B)

■ SKILLS

BLOOD DOMINION (UNIQUE SKILL)

COMBAT TECHNIQUE (RANK S)

BLACK MAGIC (RANK A)

FLIGHT (RANK B)

PRESENCE SENSING (RANK A)

ANGER DETECTION (RANK A)

MAGIC DETECTION (RANK A)

CONCEALMENT DETECTION (RANK A)

DANCING (RANK B)

MUSICAL PERFORMANCE (RANK B)

SUPER LUCK (RANK B)

■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

BLESSING OF THE DEMON LORD

SUMMONING/ MAGIC SUPPLY (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)



■ MEL (ARTIFICIAL BODY)

■ 17 Y/O / FEMALE / ANGEL / VALKYRIE

■ LEVEL: 95

■ TITLE: GLUTTONOUS GODDESS

■ HP: 1,365~1,455 (+1,073~1,163)

■ MP: 1,365~1,455 (+1,073~1,163)

■ STRENGTH: 1,365~1,455 (+1,272~1,362)

■ ENDURANCE: 1,365~1,455 (+1,272~1,362)

■ AGILITY: 1,365~1,455 (+1,272~1,362)

■ MAGIC: 1,365~1,455 (+1,272~1,362)

■ LUCK: 1,365~1,455 (+1,272~1,362)

■ EQUIPMENT

HOLY SPEAR LUMINARY (RANK S)

VALKYRIE MAIL (RANK S)

VALKYRIE HELM (RANK S)

ETHER GREAVES (RANK A)

■ SKILLS

DIVINE BINDING

SYMPATHETIC RESONANCE (UNIQUE SKILL)

SPEAR MASTERY (RANK S)

MIND'S EYE (RANK S)

BLUE MAGIC (RANK S)

WHITE MAGIC (RANK S)

FLIGHT (RANK S)

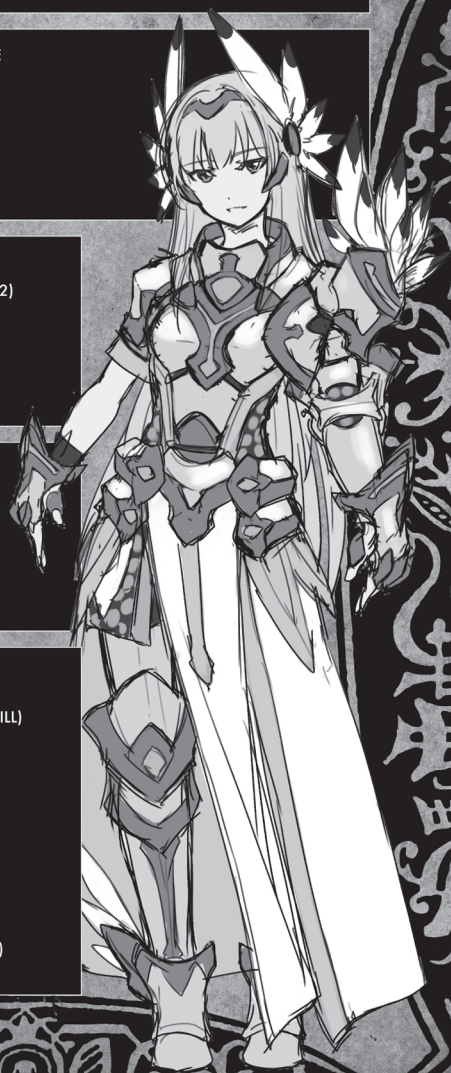
ACCESSORY CRAFTSMANSHIP (RANK S)

ALCHEMY (RANK S)

■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

SUMMONING/MAGIC SUPPLY (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)



■ RION

■ 14 Y/O / FEMALE / HUMAN / SWORD SAINT

■ LEVEL: 73

■ TITLE: GIANT-KILLER HERO

■ HP: 868/868

■ MP: 912/912

■ STRENGTH: 640

■ ENDURANCE: 226

■ AGILITY: 963

■ MAGIC: 1,011 (+320)

■ LUCK: 479

■ EQUIPMENT

DEMON SWORD CALADBOLG (RANK S)

FAUX HOLY SWORD WILL (RANK A)

BLACK RECESS (RANK S)

TAILORED BLACK LEATHER BOOTS (RANK C)

■ SKILLS

RESIDUAL SLICE (UNIQUE SKILL)

SWORD MASTERY (RANK S)

DUAL WIELD (RANK S)

ACROBATICS (RANK S)

SKY WALK (RANK B)

RED MAGIC (RANK S)

DANGER DETECTION (RANK A)

NERVES OF STEEL (RANK C)

COMPANIONSHIP (RANK B)

VIGOR (RANK A)

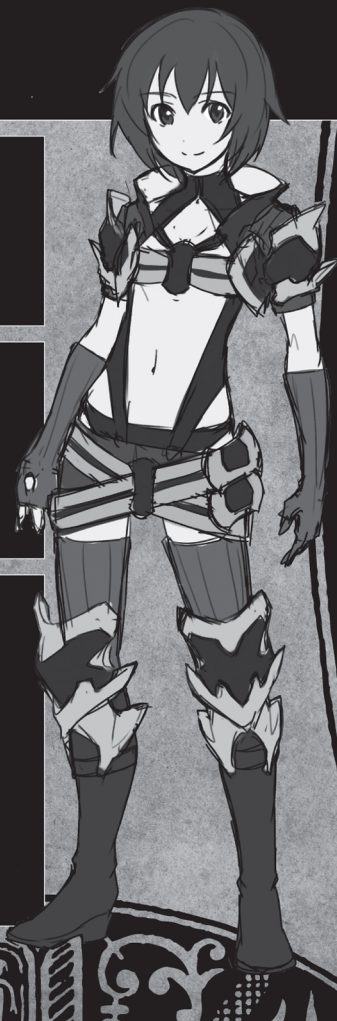
MAGIC ENHANCEMENT (RANK A)

DOUBLE GROWTH RATE

DOUBLE SKILL POINTS

■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)



Bonus Short Stories

The Men's Drunken Merrymaking

Many adventurers loved drinking, with some of them even going so far as to hit up a tavern immediately after finishing a quest, to spend the entire night in a drinking frenzy. The Fairy's Song, the establishment owned and managed by Clare, was one such place where this tended to happen. With mugs filled to the brim in hand, adventurers celebrated having survived one more day, and bragged of their exploits. At tables where patrons got a bit too worked up, arm wrestling matches would break out, which in turn would lead to everyone getting more and more excited.

The enthusiasm in the air tonight was even more boisterous than usual, and the amount of foot traffic was markedly higher. This also happened to be one of the rare days when Uld, Clare's husband, was back in town and having a celebration with his own party members.

"Nice, Heath won this time! Well, he *does* have more power than Moi, so it makes sense."

"The place sure is packed tonight! Did something happen? You know anything about it, Uld-san?"

"You idiot, have you already forgotten? You heard the announcement at the guild about the festival that's starting soon, right? Grabbing a room in this city would be impossible on the day itself, so they're probably arriving early to secure a place."

"Oh, riiight! The festival! It's soon!"

"You seriously forgot, man?"

"Hahaha, the only thing on my mind was coming here to grab a pint."

"But still, isn't it great how the ceremony is being held where we live this time? Here's a toast to Kelvin!"

Twitch.

The teenager sitting at the table with these muscular veteran adventurers — though he himself was also quite bulky — trembled once. As the party leader, Uld did not miss it.

"You've been pretty quiet since that day, kid. Is it still bothering you?"

"Oh, shut up, get off my case alre—"

"WHOOOAAAAAAA!"

A thunderous roar suddenly erupted from the arm wrestling area,

drowning out the youngster's voice. Naturally, all eyes turned in the direction of the noise.

"So it is still bothering you. That you lost to Rion-chan in arm wrestling."

"Don't remind me!!"

The teenager yelled to his heart's content for a moment, then collapsed over the table.

"Glad to see you still have that much energy in you."

"I mean...I mean...not a single good thing has happened to me since I came to this city! Who the hell was it who told me Parth is a beginner-friendly place?! It's filled with monsters!"

One of the other party members almost choked on his drink. "Uh, it's pretty much only *that* one group that's filled with monsters, all right? Sure, you're still a bit lacking in experience, but your growth is actually quite fast by normal standards."

"Being comforted by a middle-aged bachelor definitely doesn't make me feel better!"

"Oh, you wanna go *there*? You said it! You said the taboo word!"

"Guys, I'm begging you, *please* don't cause a scene here, okay? Clare's going to kill me!"

"You'll never understand how we feel!"

"You'll never understand how we feel!"

"You'll never understand how we feel!"

Things were starting to heat up at this particular table now too. It was surely only a matter of time before they skipped the arm wrestling and went straight to swinging fists.

"Yoohoo, Uld-dono hereee?"

"Gerard-dono!"

It was Gerard, a knight who always wore jet-black armor. He appeared suddenly, resetting the atmosphere surrounding the group. Judging from the slight slur to his words and strange mood, he had already downed more than a few drinks that day. And he was one of those lucky bastards who almost never got hangovers afterwards.

"Your timing is perfect! I'm sorry to rope you in, but please help me calm these guys down!"

"I see, so we're speaking with our fists! Very well, leave it to me!"

"That's not it — don't join in! STOP them!"

"Is...n't that the same thing?"

Uld managed to stop Gerard right before he drew his demon sword, and desperately explained things to prevent the situation from spiraling any further out of control. He could stop his companions somehow if he went all out, but he knew for a fact that he couldn't stop this super-grandpa even if he died trying.

Gerard would keep himself in check if either or both of his

“adopted” grandchildren were present, but chances were high that they were both fast asleep at this late hour. In fact, if someone were to forcibly bring them there, the knight might be the one to cause a scene. No, not “might,” he would *definitely* cause a scene. So Uld devoted all of his mental resources towards providing an explanation.

“Haah, haah, haah. Seriously, you guys, it’s fine to have fun and let loose during our celebrations, but keep it to a level where you don’t cause trouble for other people. Or else do it at some other tavern.”

Uld was earnest and fervent in his pleading. And after this and that, the drinking resumed with Gerard having joined them at the table.

“Gahaha! Kelvinphobia? That’s a hilarious illness to contract! But hey, don’t worry. My king is rarely hostile to those who approach him normally. As long as you don’t try to lay hands on his family or companions, that is. You should have seen what he did to someone who tried such a thing just the other day! Of course, he completely deserved it, gahaha...”

The uncomfortable silence at the table caught the knight’s attention.

“...haha...what? Oh, don’t tell me...”

“Yep, it’s too late. This guy wanted someone to start a party with and was feeling a bit...bold.”

“Oh...”

In the midst of all the excitement in the tavern, the area surrounding the teenager had taken on the atmosphere of a funeral.

“B-But not to worry, young man! You’re...still alive! If my king gets serious, there’s no way your limbs would still be intact!”

His mental state aside, the boy appeared to be absolutely fine. Gerard repeatedly assured him that things were all right, but the information he’d shared just happened to be a bit too close for comfort.

“That...is not comforting at all...”

“Then how about I comfort you?” came a voice from behind them.

“Oh, my king!”

“Shit, it’s Kelvin?!”

“Do you have to act *that* surprised? It kinda hurts.”

Without anyone having noticed, Kelvin had approached and was standing behind the teenager’s back. Although he wasn’t holding his staff, he was wearing his characteristic battle-ready black robe. He showed up at the tavern at night every once in a while, so him being there wasn’t actually that unusual.

“By the way, Gerard, this young man here is the one who challenged Rion to an arm wrestling match, right? Which means he

held her hand, didn't he?"

"So, you like arm wrestling, young man! How about you have a match against me this time? Don't worry, I'll go easy on you. We're just playing around."

"Your tone is completely different from just a second ago!!"

"Hey, kid, it's fine. Gerard's arm is only about twice as strong as Rion's."

"What do you mean by, 'It's fine'?!"

The pressure emanating from the towering knight, who had already assumed an arm wrestling position, completely broke the boy's heart. It seemed the brother with a sister complex *was* furious after all.

The Goddess's Gourmet Tour in Parth

The Parthian Gourmet Guide

When talking about the gourmet scene in Parth, one simply cannot go without mentioning the Fairy's Song. It is both an inn and a tavern that boasts a menu rich in diversity, prices that go easy on your purse strings, and a wonderfully hospitable proprietress who's happy to cook anything you want as long as it isn't too elaborate.

Most important of all is that each and every dish that comes out of the kitchen is absolutely delicious. During normal meal times, the place is filled with locals, young adventurers, and guests who are staying there, so we recommend that you visit a bit earlier or later.

The proprietress of the Fairy's Song has handled the cooking on her own for years, but there are rumors that she's recently taken on an apprentice who she's been passing down the very essence of her techniques to. Our reporters have yet to confirm this, but based on testimony from customers who happened to be there at the right time, this apprentice is a girl of unparalleled beauty whose proficiency at cooking has already surpassed that of her mentor's. If these rumors are indeed true, then the continued prosperity of the Fairy's Song is guaranteed for —

Melfina softly closed the gourmet guide that she had purchased the day before, her light blue hair blowing in the wind. The place her feet had carried her was none other than the Fairy's Song, the inn Kelvin and his party had been based out of until recently. The sign with the illustration of a dancing fairy was shaking a little.

"So, Clare's cooking was delicious enough to be featured in the Parthian Gourmet Guide. I was only able to look on helplessly all this time, but now that I've been Summoned, things are different. I have also saved up several days' worth of the pocket money that Honey

gave me, so I have more than enough war funds. This hunger of mine that I suppressed at home yesterday so as to not cause trouble shall be satisfied in full today!"

Melfina excitedly barged into the tavern. Unfortunately, she was a bit too forceful and ended up drawing the attention of all the diners.

Ugh, I...may have forgotten myself a little just now.

Apparently, even goddesses felt embarrassment sometimes. If her wings had been manifested just then, they would have been red to their very tips.

"Oh? Aren't you Kel-chan's..."

Just as she was inwardly berating herself for the faux pas, by some heavenly providence, Clare noticed her standing there. Melfina slid into one of the counter seats, trying to play it cool.

"My name is Mel. I got curious after hearing so many wonderful things from everyone about your cooking, so I decided to check it out for myself today. Please keep this a secret."

"Is that so? Goodness, I don't think my cooking's anything compared to what Efil-chan can make now."

"Please, there's no need to be so modest. By the way, what is today's speci—"

Just then, Mel's eyes happened to fall on a poster on the wall that was making only a token effort at asserting itself. On it was the illustration of a mountain of meat atop a large plate. The large letters underneath read, "Mammoth Lunch."

I do feel like eating something heavy today. Oh, it's surprisingly cheap. Let's have that, then.

After making up her mind, Mel was quick to act. She jabbed a finger towards the poster, a smile filled with goddessly love on her face. The tiniest bit of gluttonous appetite also leaked through, but she could hardly be faulted for that, could she?

"You plan on ordering that by yourself? That's the dish that guys doing physical labor tight on money would share among five people. It's not really the choice I'd recommend to a dainty-looking girl like yourself. Though my husband did just bring back the ingredients, so it's not like I *can't* make it..."

"Then please make it for me!"

"I-If you say so."

Melfina's reply was so swift and sure that Clare couldn't help but falter. *Well, if she can't finish it, she can call Kelvin and the others to come have the rest*, she thought as she headed to the back to begin cooking.

Before long, a mountain of food appeared from the kitchen. The salad that came with it was a normal portion, which only served to make the meat dish look even more enormous. As the plate itself was

also huge, Melfina had to move from the counter to a table that could seat several people.

When the food was carried out, Mel became the center of attention once again, but she no longer cared about such trivial matters. The only thing in her head was the culinary masterpiece before her.

“Thanks for your patience. Once it gets too tough to continue, don’t force yourself, all right?”

“Thank you for the concern, but it is entirely unnecessary. Without further ado, here goes!”

Melfina gracefully placed her hands together to give thanks for the food, then promptly began digging in. The way she used both fork and knife was surprisingly elegant. The look of bliss that came over her young face with every bite was impactful enough to warm the hearts of everyone present.

At least, it was in the beginning.

“Although it didn’t take you long to cook such a large quantity, the seasoning is very thorough. This is absolutely delicious. The compatibility of the meat with the ground meat sauce poured over it is exemplary, and the vegetables served along with the main dish are a wonderful accompaniment thanks to their delightful crunchiness. The potato buried within, which has thoroughly absorbed the juices from the meat, is also worthy of note and —”

That was when the other diners started to realize that something was off. Even though Melfina’s commentary was continuing nonstop, the mountain of meat before her was disappearing at an alarming rate. Thanks to her unbelievably high Agility stat, she was capable of commentating, bringing food to her mouth, chewing, and swallowing, all with ridiculous speed. But no one present was capable of seeing through such skilled technique. Consequently, it seemed to them as if some invisible presence was wolfing down the food.

“...and that’s that. Thank you for the meal.”

It had barely been three minutes when Melfina once again put her hands together, this time to signal that she was done. Every scrap of food had been completely polished off. The only thing left was the goddess’s full-faced smile.

“I’d love to order seconds, but there are many other restaurants that I also want to visit today. Clare-san, I’ll come again. Your cooking is truly delicious.”

“A-All right, sure, any time.”

With her guide book under her arm, Melfina exited the store with her head held high. The adventurers and diners present could do nothing but watch her go with blank amazement.

“Hey, dude, who was that cute girl just now?”

“What makes you think I know? Clare-san, do you?”

“She’s the newest member of Kel-chan’s party. She sure has an appetite!”

“Kelvin-san’s?! Ahh...no wonder, then.”

“Ohhh, that makes sense. That explains it.”

Melfina’s debut had been quite striking indeed, but the people of Parth were surprisingly quick to accept her.

The Apprentice Maid Goes Shopping with Clotho

If one were to list places that stood out in Parth, the clock tower would surely be mentioned. Famous as a symbol of the city, the structure was very much a tourist attraction. However, there was another place that the residents of Parth were whispering about as of late. It was the mansion where the city’s one and only Rank A adventurer, Kelvin, lived.

A large estate would stand out by its nature alone, enough to draw the gaze of many passersby. Any who did look would quickly notice the golems at the door. These knight-like constructs that normally wouldn’t move an inch while standing guard emanated an overwhelming presence that further added to the conspicuousness of the place. Most people who entertained unsavory thoughts regarding the property would think twice after a single look at them.

“Mr. Knight, bye-bye!”

Surprisingly, these golems also had a playfulness to them where they would wave back if a child acknowledged them. This also contributed to their rising fame. Apparently, some found the contrast between this side of the creatures and the first impression they gave off endearing.

“Mom, I’m off to do the shopping now!”

“Take care, all right? I’ve heard talk about strange people around here lately.”

“It’ll be fine, Clotho will be with me!”

“Hmm, that’s true. Well, all right, off you go, then.”

“Be back soon!”

The girl who energetically dashed out of the house that had generated such talk was the apprentice maid, Ruka. With a miniature Clotho clone on her tiny shoulder, she was heading off to perform one of her duties: shopping for groceries.

“Clotho, it’s unhealthy to be floating in the fountain all day long, all right? You gotta go out for a walk sometimes too! What? What do you mean by that ‘X’?”

Clotho had attempted to reply that it was working even while floating in the fountain by contorting its body, but Ruka failed to

catch its meaning. When the slime finally gave up and shook itself in resignation, the young girl turned her attention away and continued barreling down the road. Compared to other kids her age, she was quite — no, she was *extremely* fast. That was one of the more obvious results of the power-leveling she had received from being in Kelvin's party.

"Oh! Honey, Ruka-chan's come."

"Hm? You're right, that way of running is Ruka-chan's style without a doubt. Has she gotten faster?"

The old couple managing a fruit and vegetable store turned their heads toward the approaching footsteps in a familiar manner. The first time she had run up to them that way, they'd gotten quite a shock, but humans were adaptable creatures, after all.

"Aaaaand I've arrived! Mister! Missus! Good morning!"

"Good morning to you too. I'm glad to see you so energetic today."

"I have allll the energy! Yay!"

"It seems like you still have a lot to learn as an apprentice, though."

"Y-You aren't supposed to bring that up!"

Ruka and her mother had been hired to serve as maids at Kelvin's home. Unlike her mother, however, Ruka had the word "apprentice" in her title. In order to become a full-fledged maid quickly, she spent every day pouring herself into improving at her job. She would do her best in tag so as to be able to run faster; she would play with Rion, Kelvin's little sister; she would learn how to use a sword from Gerard — in any case, she was definitely making an effort. The direction that her efforts were taking her might have been a bit off and she might have been straight out playing sometimes, but she was most certainly doing her best.

"Are you out shopping for the family today? All by yourself?"

"Nope, Clotho's with me!"

"Ahh, the monster employed by Kelvin-san."

"Still, it's a rare sight seeing you without Efil-chan."

"Umm, she has a...pomoshon exam today? So she went out with Master. Mom is busy doing something else, so I'm on shopping duty by myself!"

"Well, look at you, you're a big girl now. So, did you properly memorize the list of what you're supposed to buy?"

"Hehe, I've got just the thing. Clotho, give me you-know-what!"

From her shoulder, Clotho retrieved a piece of paper that Ruka then passed to the elderly couple.

"What...is this?"

"Mom wrote it out for me!"

“I knew it.”

“I knew it.”

So, she had *not* memorized it after all. A peek at the memo revealed an extensive list of vegetables and fruits. Apparently, it was a shopping list for this particular store.

“Th-This much again, huh?”

“Grandpa Gerard and Mel-sama both eat a lot. Well, Mel-sama eats most of it, actually.”

“You’re talking about that unbelievably pretty girl who joined you guys recently, right? I saw her walking by one time holding a gourmet magazine in a really good mood.”

“Uh-huh! She’s Master’s, um, fee-ahn-say?”

“Cough, cough, cough! S-Seriously? Wow, he’s just, wow...”

“My, oh my! Well, we’re glad that you’re buying so much from us. Here, an apple on the house for our loyal customer!”

“Yay, thank you!”

Ruka accepted the apple and did a little jig as Clotho expanded its body to Store the mountain of ingredients, not leaving a single sprout behind. Then the slime reverted to its miniature size just as quickly and resumed its position on the little girl’s shoulder as if nothing had happened.

“No matter how many times I see it, I still find it an incredible sight.”

“Being able to buy things without having to hold them seems so convenient. I guess there are many different kinds of slimes out there.”

“Um, now I have to buy meat, and salt, and sugar. Mister and missus, thank you for the apple. I still have to buy lots of things, so I gotta go! See you next time!”

“All right, then. We’ll be waiting!”

As the girl took off, apple in hand, the couple watched her receding figure with warm expressions on their faces.

Sera’s Shopping

By now, Sera was quite a well-known figure in Parth. After she had shown up one day and joined Kelvin’s party, her stunning beauty, unimaginable strength, and innocent personality won her such fame and popularity that it took no time at all for a fanclub to be set up in her honor. The majority of the organization was male, but there were a surprisingly large group of females who looked up to her and fantasized about having her as their older sister.

“Hmm...”

“What’s got you thinking so hard, Sera-san?”

This famous demon was currently inside Parth’s one and only

shop that offered musical instruments. For the past half hour or so, she had been standing in front of the most expensive grand piano there, arms crossed, groaning.

“Boss, could you perhaps sell this at a lower price?”

“Ha! Ha! Ha! You want a discount, do you? Since you always give us so much business, I want to say, “I’d love to,” but I’m afraid that’s just not possible for this item.”

Sera, who normally commanded such admiration from other adventurers, was currently nothing more than a child looking through a shop window with sparkling eyes. She was staring with incredible intensity at the piano before her.

“You’ve had your eye on it for quite a while now, haven’t you? Couldn’t you ask Kelvin-san to buy it for you? Normal adventurers wouldn’t be able to afford it, but seeing as he managed to purchase such a huge estate, perhaps he’d be willing to buy this for you on a whim.”

“Kelvin is strict about wasting money. He might say yes if it’s a normal instrument, but this would be a really tough ask.”

“That’s a pity. We would love to let it go to someone like yourself, who actually possesses the skill to bring out its true potential.”

In this world, performing with instruments was considered an upper-class pastime. Some taverns might have had simple instruments lying around, but generally, the more sophisticated ones were enjoyed exclusively by the nobility. If one wanted to listen to music, there were festivals. If one wanted to play, however...well, the number of people possessing significant skill with an instrument was quite limited, to put it mildly.

The owner of the store knew that this customer possessed significant musical ability. In fact, he even thought her good enough to take in students. Due to his store normally not attracting that much traffic in the first place, he found the presence of someone who seemed to truly love music for music’s sake, like she did, rather enjoyable. As such, he very much wanted to help her in any way he could.

“Really?! Then let it go...to me!”

“That was a figure of speech, okay? My store will go bankrupt if I just give it to you, you know?!” Clarification: he wanted to help her in any way he could...without putting his business at risk. “Hmm...I suppose there’s no other way but for you to consider your own financial situation. How about looking at it long-term and saving up for it little by little? Fortunately for you, and not so fortunately for me, a high-class item like this isn’t in any great demand.”

“What if I want it now?”

What she was asking notwithstanding, Sera’s eyes were dead

serious.

"You have a childish side that comes out every now and then, Sera-san. Do you really want it *that* badly?"

"I do, but I've already gotten this week's pocket money from Kelvin."

"I'm afraid you'll just have to be patient, then. But don't worry, you can play it as much as you want here in the store."

The shopkeeper graciously offered the best compromise he could, expecting his suggestion to allay her emotions for the time being.

"If I buy this now, I won't be able to order the newest fishing rod from Toraj. In the catalogs that Tsubaki sends over frequently, there's a certain model for catching smaller fish in mountain streams that I've been wanting for a while, but...nah, never mind! As they said, there's no time like the present! I'll buy this grand piano, boss!"

Clarification: he wanted to help her in any way he could...if she actually needed his help.

Sera, who was the kind of person to pour everything she had into her leisure activities, did not have music as her sole hobby. This time, however, her mood just happened to lean in the right direction.

So, you had the money to buy it this whole time?! screamed the store owner from the bottom of his heart as Sera unloaded a torrent of coins from Clotho's Storage through the clone dedicated to her personal use.

Rion's Exploration Squad

"And so, we will be exploring this mansion!"

"Arf...?" (What do you mean, 'and so'?)

A figurative question mark appeared above Rion's partner, Alex, the shadow wolf who spent the majority of each day next to her. The two had been walking down a corridor when the girl suddenly stopped in her tracks and the above words came out of her cute mouth. There had been no prelude or any context whatsoever.

"Alex, think about it. We've been living with Kel-nii for a while now, but we've yet to fully discover everything that's in this house, right? This is our home now too. It would be strange if there were places in it that we don't know about, wouldn't it?"

"Arf...?" (I guess so?)

"Uh-huh. So, let's explore it!"

"Arf, arrrf..." (Jeez, all right then.)

Only after thinking it through and determining that looking around the house wouldn't pose any significant danger did Alex sigh and agree to accompany Rion on her expedition. But his black tail was now wagging left and right enthusiastically. Although he had a rather mature personality, he was still only three years old. He loved playing

too.

“First stop, Gramps’s room! Ah, hold on, we need to get everyone’s permission before entering their rooms!”

“*Arf! Arf.*” (Good job. You have to be courteous towards those you’re close to as well.)

Everyone was apparently lounging around the living room, munching on snacks. After obtaining permission from them without issue, Rion decided to visit each room in turn, starting from the first floor. The room that was closest to the main entrance was Gerard’s.

“You think this is training equipment?”

“*Arf! Arf! Arrrf.*” (For furniture, he only has a bed, a table, and a chair. Other than that, it seems he only has swords and shields as decorations.)

“This is stuff used to take care of equipment, ah, and this is a whetstone. Hmm, if I’m to summarize Gramps’s room in one phrase, it’d be...simplicity and fortitude!”

“*Arf!*” (Simplicity and fortitude!)

The next rooms belonged to Ellie and Ruka. The latter’s eyes practically shone with excitement when Rion asked her for permission. Unfortunately, the young girl was still in the middle of work, and ended up being dragged away by the back of her collar.

After parting ways with a promise to play together later on, Rion resumed her exploration. Aside from a few cook books, the two rooms themselves turned out not to be so different from the other empty guest rooms. As such, there wasn’t much to say about them.

“And this is the bathroom! I know I always say this, but it sure is big. There’s plenty of space for Kel-nii and me to go in together.”

“*Arf.*” (There’s a lake in the forest that’s even bigger.)

In this world, there weren’t many houses that had baths. Although the one here was currently already big enough for several people to use at once, Kelvin was actually planning to expand it even more in the near future. The passion that Japanese people held for bath-taking was so remarkable that the presence of the tub had been one big factor in Kelvin ultimately settling on this particular home.

“Next is the second floor. Aside from our own room, from the staircase, there’s Mel-nee’s, Sera-nee’s, Efil-nee’s, then Kel-nii’s all the way in the back.”

“*Arf.*” (The rooms on the second floor are starting to get quite full.)

“There’re only two empty ones left, I think? Maybe they’ll have inhabitants sooner than we think.”

“*Arf, arf...*” (Haha, surely not.)

After wasting a bit of time chatting together, the girl and the wolf resumed their exploration, following the order mentioned previously.

“On the table is...a mortar for concocting potions and probably the ingredients that need to be ground up. Is this ore for making accessories? Mel-nee’s room is full of things that would be useful for adventuring.”

“*Arf, arf arf arf?*” (Isn’t there a comment you should be making first, Rion?)

“It’s...really messy.”

It was true that there were a ton of things that would be very valuable to adventurers inside Melfina’s room. However, the state of the place could not be called neat and tidy by any stretch of the imagination. Incidentally, the room owner herself had only just woken up and headed downstairs.

“That, and there are surprisingly few things to eat in here!”

“*Arf!*” (Very surprising indeed!)

Normally, people would call such a comment “rude.”

“Sera-nee’s room is...wow, there’re so many fishing rods! And so many clothes! Did Efil-nee make all these? There are quite a few designs that I remember from Japan...”

“*Arrf. Arf.*” (Sera did mention before that she wants a piano and a violin too.)

“Ahaha, seems like this is going to be one busy room.”

Even so, the room was much more orderly than the previous one, with everything seeming to have its assigned place. It was a busy space, but in a good way.

“Then Efil-nee’s room...is the girliest one of all...”

“*Arf...*” (The normalness of it sure seems reassuring...)

After taking a roughly ten-minute break to bask in the room’s healing properties, the two explorers finally reached the room of the house’s master.

“It looks like...there aren’t any sexy books underneath the bed. I guess that would be a bit too predictable.”

“*Arf?*” (What are you doing?)

“Um, it’s a sort of cliché from my previous life,ahaha...”

Another question mark appeared over the shadow wolf’s head.

For those who are curious, the only things Rion found in the room were blueprints and brainstorm for weapons and equipment, and books on battle strategy and magic. Even if there *were* sexy books there, they’d have been neatly stacked on top of his table every time Efil came in to clean the place. It was always the final blow that would bring tears to boys’ eyes.

“Last stop is underground! There’s still stuff behind the training room, isn’t there? Let’s take a look —”

“*Arf! Arrrrrf.*” (Rion, my nose tells me that there’s a huge labyrinth down there. We might get lost, so let’s leave it alone for

now.)

“Awww...”

This house was clearly not ready to give up all of its secrets just yet.

Efil's Promotion Exam

“A promotion exam?” Kelvin asked, lounging on a sofa in his house.

“Yes, Master. It appears that I met the requirements before I knew it. I received this from Ange-san.”

Efil passed her master a document in Guildmaster Rio's handwriting, announcing her eligibility to apply for a Rank B promotion exam. The flowing text written in this world's language somehow seemed as slippery as the man himself.

“Oh, that's right, you're still Rank C...ostensibly.”

“It's not ostensible, I genuinely am a Rank C adventurer, Master. Whereas you have already reached Rank A, I am as yet immature and unable to hold a candle to you.”

“You sure are modest...”

Efil's puzzled tilt of the head evoked a wry smile from Kelvin. In terms of adventurer rank, C was an indication of a veteran. And in Parth, that would refer to Uld. On the other hand, Efil had already, along with Kelvin, defeated an archdemon and an evil dragon, both ranked S in strength, let alone C or B. That was proof enough that she already possessed strength on par with Rank S. The only reason she had been C this long was because she had yet to complete the number of quests needed for promotion. If she had been allowed to skip ranks like Kelvin had, it would not have been at all surprising for her to be standing shoulder-to-shoulder with him as a fellow Rank A adventurer.

“That aside, it's true that your current rank is completely inappropriate for you. Will you take it now?”

“According to that notice, once I obtain permission from the exam proctor, I may take it at any time.”

“That so? In that case, I'll come along too.”

“Will you really? I would find that very reassuring!”

Kelvin's heart warmed at Efil's cute gesture of clenching her fist before her chest in an effort to rouse herself.

“Um, Master...”

“What is it?”

“If I manage to pass the exam, um...may I...have a reward...?” the maid asked with slightly flushed cheeks.

In response, the man promptly gave her a thumbs up and replied,

“Leave it to me!”

What the reward would be had yet to be specified, but the hearts of the two seemed to be in resonance for a split second. However, someone else had been watching their exchange.

“So...what’s the reward gonna be?”

“Holy sh—— Rion?!”

“R-Rion-sama?!”

The figure popping her head up from behind the sofa was Kelvin’s stepsister, Rion. She had been in the middle of playing hide-and-seek with Ruka, the apprentice maid. Having been lost in their own world, Kelvin and Efil had failed to notice the teenage girl stealthily hiding herself.

“Umm...”

Efil shot Kelvin a troubled look. This stepbrother pushed Parallel Processing — the skill he had borrowed from Miyabi, one of the Heroes of Deramis — to full throttle as he tried to come up with an appropriate reward.

“There’s no need to tell me; I can guess! Efil-nee, it’s head pats, isn’t it?!”

“Th-That’s right. When Master pats my head, it makes me feel very happy and warm. Did she guess right, Master?”

“Yeeeah, that’s it,” Kelvin nodded, looking slightly disappointed for some reason.

After managing to gloss over things, Kelvin and Efil left Rion and headed for the exam. It was to be held at the foot of a steep cliff a slight distance from Parth. High above them flew numerous winged monsters.

“All right then, I will proceed to explain the details of the exam.”

“So listen up!”

“Guildmaster and Ange-san are serving as my proctors?”

Before Efil’s eyes stood the guildmaster of the Parthian branch of the Adventurer’s Guild, Rio, and one of the receptionists there, Ange. With clipboards in hand, both looked very much the part of exam proctors.

“As the guildmaster, I am basically the only person in Parth who is qualified to oversee high-ranked promotion exams. If you take the Rank A exam down the line, it is almost certain that I will be serving as proctor for that as well.”

“I’m his attendant! You got this, Efil-chan!”

“Ahem. Ange-kun, you are still on the job.”

“Oh, I’m sorry! Um...we look forward to your success, Efil-sama.”

Although Ange changed up her word choice, the meaning of what she was saying remained the same. Guildmaster Rio did not pursue the matter further, though. Normally, a promotion exam would be

conducted in a more solemn and serious manner, but this time, the atmosphere seemed rather relaxed. Somehow, Kelvin thought he knew why.

“I shall now begin the explanation. Reaching Rank B is a sign that someone has become a master of their chosen path. The purpose of this exam is to confirm whether you truly possess the strength worthy of this distinction. Efil-kun, your weapon of choice is the bow, is that correct?”

“That is correct.”

“In that case, your task is to shoot down a monster flying in the sky. You are allowed to use a maximum of three arrows. Considering how high up the monsters are flying, you may climb to the top of this cliff if you wish. If you successfully shoot down one of those monsters, your promotion to B will be acknowledged. Any questions?”

“None at all.”

Efil promptly nocked an arrow and began. Without enveloping them in flames, she shot all three arrows in quick succession. There was no hesitation whatsoever. Almost immediately, screams filled the sky.

“I think the result was obvious from the start,” Kelvin murmured, dropping his gaze to the ground where six monster corpses now lay. Efil had indeed used only three arrows, but each one had first pierced one monster before taking the life of another. She had easily surpassed the conditions of the exam set out by Rio.

“Ange-kun...did I perhaps set the bar too low?”

“What if Efil-chan uses the monsters she shot down to whip up a dish delicious enough to make you cry? Would you acknowledge her promotion then, guildmaster?”

“Hey, nice idea, Ange.”

“Well, all right, I didn’t ask for suggestions for new requirements to tack on.”

To no one’s surprise, Efil became a Rank B adventurer.

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